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A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, and the Bird Committee of the East Africa Natural History Society

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Editorial

Benjamin Franklin famously remarked that there were only two certainties: death and taxes. Readers may be wondering if the delayed appearance of *Kenya Birds* should constitute a third. Producing the magazine is difficult at the moment; not because of any lack of material — there are plenty of interesting articles and records coming in, as the contents of this double issue show — but because there is so much else taking the time of your editors.

We are considering ways to deal with the bottleneck. In the meantime, any offers of *skilled* (please note the emphasis!) help with editing or layout would certainly be appreciated. More sponsor subscribers might also give us the financial resources to take on extra assistance when needed — do consider becoming a sponsor when you renew.

This issue contains news up to July 1999, and records up to July 1998. Records for the 'missing' year are still being compiled. They will be in volume 8 (which with luck will appear before the next millennium is too far advanced...)

Many thanks to all those who have sent in notes and observations. Whatever material we haven't fitted into this issue will, again, go into the next. Just a reminder that when vol. 8 appears it will only be sent to readers who have renewed their subscriptions — please take the time to send your subs in now!

Wishing you good birding, and an excellent World Birdwatch on 2 and 3 October! — *The Editors*

Subscription rates for Volume 8

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Please address all correspondence to: The Editors, **Kenya Birds,** Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya

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THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
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News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

Project Kasigau '98: A preliminary report

Mount Kasigau rises alone, 50 kilometres south-east of the Taita Hills massif. It is a forbidding peak, reaching over 1,600 metres in a near-vertical ascent from the plains. Isolation and inaccessibility have largely hidden the secrets of this mountain from researchers since Van Someren visited it in 1938. All that was known until recently was that the indigenous forest was believed to be very similar to the tiny fragments remaining on the Taita Hills, and that it contained at least one of the three critically endangered Taita endemic birds; the Taita White-eye. The extent and vulnerability of this population was, however, unknown; nor was it known whether Taita Thrush was also present in Kasigau's forests (though it was rumoured to be).

Such an enigmatic situation led to plans for an ornithologically-centred expedition to Mt. Kasigau, under the joint auspices of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) in Nairobi and the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norwich, England. With support from these institutions and the Royal Geographic Society, a joint UK-Kenyan team won the Tropical Forest category of the BP Conservation Awards (see below); providing the funding needed to realise our plans. Led by Jim Barnes at UEA, with experience of conservation research from the Taita Hills project, the team comprised another Taita Hills veteran, Roger Barnes (a Leeds-based artist — and Jim's dad!), plus Ronald Mulwa and Mwangi Githiru from NMK and Peter Burston, John Leckie and myself from UEA.

The project team assembled in Nairobi in mid-June this year and was soon in the village of Rukanga at the base of Kasigau, contemplating its forbidding presence and beginning to realise why no-one else had mustered the energy to survey the mountain. Fortunately, we had information on a suitable campsite some way up the slope. For most of the next three months, this site was to act as the base for our research. Data collection was centred on systematic bird surveys, supported by mist-netting and vegetation studies.

Initial work suggested that Kasigau's forests were somewhat impoverished in birds, both species and numbers — possibly due to the historical

isolation of the peak and resultant local extinctions. However, over time we made several important discoveries. First, the higher altitude forests on Kasigau appear to be a crucial refuge for the Taita White-eye. With numbers in the Taitas low and threatened by habitat loss and degradation, it was reassuring to find that Kasigau's largely intact forests supported a good population of this species. Flocks of over 100 were not uncommon. Also, such an isolated peak in the plains seemed irresistible to raptors. We saw about 25 species (including Egyptian Vulture, African Crowned Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, Bat Hawk and an oversummering Eleonora's Falcon) on or around Mt Kasigau, many using the forests, nesting cliffs or thermals of the mountain regularly. The *Acacia/Commiphora* bushland around the mountain's base supported many species (including Violet Wood-Hoopoe and Pallid Honeyguide), while Striped Pipits were found around bare rocks from the base of the mountain, near the villages at 600 m, upwards.

The absence of the Taita Thrush and Taita Apalis was disappointing. On the other hand, the absence of any of the endemic birds of the Tanzania-Malawi mountain range (with which the Taitas and Kasigau are currently included as an endemic bird area (EBA)) by BirdLife International, provides further support for designation of Kasigau and the Taitas as a separate and distinct EBA. The final necessary evidence may come from ongoing DNA studies into the exact taxonomic status of the three Taita endemic birds.

We found significant tracts of undisturbed indigenous forest on the upper slopes of Kasigau. Although degradation from rising human populations may seem inevitable, we found quite a high level of conservation awareness in the villages around the mountain. We were able to stimulate awareness of the mountain's importance further through work with several local schools at the end of our visit. The response from both students and teachers was enthusiastic and we intend to continue our work with the schools now the survey has finished. We believe local people would readily back a longer-term conservation initiative. The first steps towards this will be made by Ronald Mulwa when he returns to Mt Kasigau as part of an MSc study on the Taita White-eye.

With tourism currently so important a part of Kenya's economy, we hope Kasigau residents may see conservation-related income in the future from birdwatching visitors to the mountain and the surrounding area. If you visit Kasigau, please make people aware that you are there because the

mountain's forests and their special birds have been conserved. — *John Pilgrim, 41 Wellsfield, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8DW, UK and Ornithology Dept., P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

Note

This joint Ornithology Department–University of East Anglia Kasigau team won the Tropical Forests category of the prestigious BP Conservation Programme awards for 1998. The £5,000 award provided the key funding needed for the expedition, led by UEA Biology student Jim Barnes, to carry out its work.

The Conservation Programme, now in its fourteenth year, is organised by BirdLife International and Fauna & Flora International and supported by BP. For information and application forms, contact Katharine Gotto (the Programme Manager) at BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.

Birds of semi-arid areas

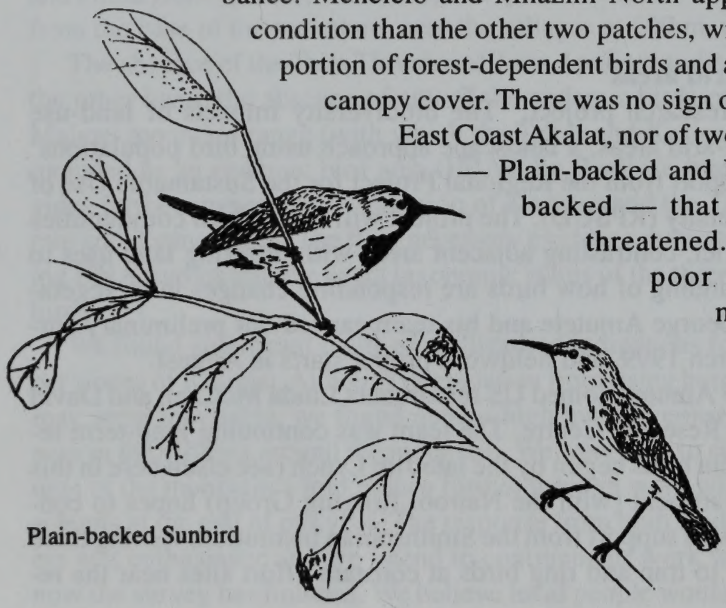
A Department research project, 'The biodiversity impacts of land-use changes in semi-arid areas: a landscape approach using bird populations' has received support from the Regional Project for the Sustainable Use of Dryland Biodiversity (RPSUD). The project will survey bird communities in Laikipia district, contrasting adjacent areas with differing land uses to gain an understanding of how birds are responding changes in to vegetation structure. George Amutete and his team carried out preliminary survey work in March 1999, and fieldwork proper starts in August.

In April 1999 Amutete joined US researchers Linda McCann and David Niven at Mpala Research Centre. The team was continuing long-term research on Laikipia birds begun by the late Jim Lynch (see elsewhere in this issue). The Department (with the Nairobi Ringing Group) hopes to continue this work with support from the Smithsonian Institution, visiting three times each year to trap and ring birds at constant-effort sites near the research centre.

A first look at the Tana River forests

The unique riparian forests on the lower Tana River are an Important Bird Area, sheltering threatened birds such as East Coast Akalat and (if it is not yet extinct) the mysterious White-winged Apalis. Some of the most important patches of forest are protected in the Tana River Primate National Reserve, set up to conserve two rare sub-species of monkeys (the Tana River

Mangabey and Tana River Red Colobus) that are found only here. Unfortunately, the Reserve has long faced serious conservation problems, with conflicts between the management authority (Kenya Wildlife Service) and the local people who still live in the reserve and use its resources. To solve these problems, the Global Environment Facility funded a major conservation project in the Reserve. For various reasons the project has experienced numerous delays and false starts, but some work on the research component finally got under way early in 1999. Along with other research teams from the National Museums, an Ornithology team led by Joseph Oyugi visited the Reserve from 20–27 February 1999. They mist-netted and observed birds in four forest patches, Mchelelo, Congolani Central, Mnazini North and Mnazini South. All the patches showed signs of disturbance. Mchelelo and Mnazini North appeared in better condition than the other two patches, with a higher proportion of forest-dependent birds and a more complete canopy cover. There was no sign of the threatened East Coast Akalat, nor of two forest sunbirds — Plain-backed and Uluguru Violet-backed — that are regionally threatened. Unfortunately poor security still makes it difficult to survey many of the forest patches in the area, especially on the west bank of the river.



Plain-backed Sunbird

Naivasha nest-boxes await their occupants

Many woodland birds such as woodpeckers, barbets, wood-hoopoes and hornbills depend on tree-holes for nesting. Suitable nest holes are usually in short supply and these species do badly when large old trees are cut down, and when dead wood is removed. Elsewhere in the world nest boxes have been used with great success to provide nesting sites for hole-nesting woodland species — could they be used in East Africa as well? Work by

Department intern Michael Maina is putting this to the test. Maina was recently awarded a grant by the African Bird Club for a project to set up and monitor nest-boxes in the woodland at Lake Naivasha. Boxes of varying sizes and designs are in place at several sites already and being monitored — now it's up to the birds...

Waterbird ups and downs: what do they tell us?

The Department has been co-ordinating counts of waterbirds at the main Rift Valley lakes since 1990. As well as the actual numbers of birds counted, the way in which they vary from year to year can be very informative. Department researchers recently analysed patterns of variations in Rift Valley waterbird counts. The results were presented at the international conference on shallow tropical waters and humans, held at Lake Naivasha in April 1999.

Patterns of variation in waterbird numbers can give useful information about several different aspects:

(1) How significant are population changes? We need to know how variability differs across different waterbird groups. If numbers in a particular group fluctuate greatly, we should not be surprised to see large changes from year to year. If they are usually stable, then a big change should set alarm bells ringing.

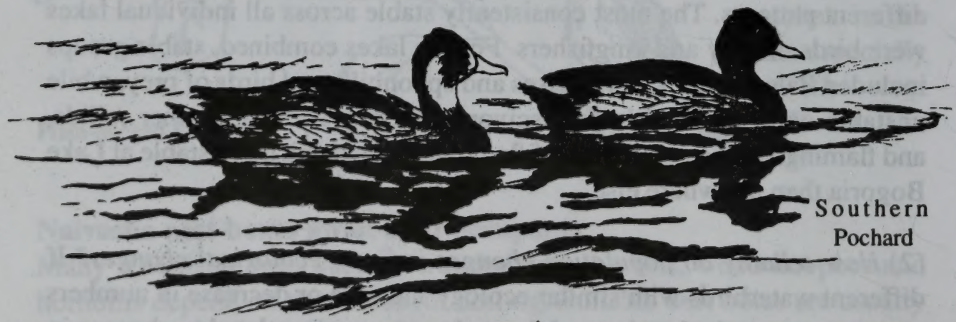
The results: Individual lakes, and particular waterbird groups, showed very different patterns. The most consistently stable across all individual lakes were birds of prey and kingfishers. For the lakes combined, stable groups included Palaearctic waders, ibises and spoonbills and birds of prey, while unstable ones included large piscivores, grebes, coots and other rallids, and flamingos. The population of flamingos was much more stable at Lake Bogoria than anywhere else.

(2) How reliably do population changes indicate ecological changes? If different waterbirds with similar ecology increase or decrease in numbers together at a particular site, and these changes can be related to changes in the environment, this increases our confidence in using these groups to indicate specific ecological changes.

The results: This happened for several groups, such as different waders at Naivasha and various large piscivores at Nakuru. These correlations could indeed be related to local ecological conditions.

(3) How independent are counts at particular wetlands? Do particular groups of waterbirds show correlated patterns across sites? These could occur in three different ways, reflecting three different scenarios:

- There could be a more-or-less constant 'pool' of waterbirds in the southern Rift Valley, which responds to local conditions by making local movements. If numbers of a particular group increased at one site they would therefore decrease at another. Waterbird counts could then indicate a site's ecological character, but sites could not be treated independently.
- The waterbirds could come from a much wider geographic pool, with the number in the southern Rift depending mainly on what conditions were like elsewhere. Numbers in particular groups would thus tend to increase or decrease in parallel across different sites. Waterbird counts in this case would say more about conditions elsewhere than the site where they were counted.
- The waterbirds could come from a much wider geographic pool, but respond to the conditions at particular sites. Numbers in particular groups would then show few clear relationships across sites. Waterbird counts would thus give a good indication of a site's ecological character, and sites can be treated independently.



Southern Pochard

The results: there are very few clear relationships, either positive or negative, between sites. This suggests that waterbird counts do indeed give a good indication of a site's ecological character, and individual wetlands can be treated independently.

Overall, the results give a boost to the idea that we can use waterbirds as indicators of ecological character in Rift Valley wetlands.

Ornithologists migrate south

Department researchers and associates Joseph Oyugi, Alfred Simiyu, Munir Virani and Leon Bennun attended the International Ornithological Congress in Durban, South Africa during August 1998. The IOC has never been held in Africa before, so this was an opportunity not to be missed. It turned out to be a highly enjoyable (and worthwhile) meeting, thanks in large part to superb organisation by the hosts, BirdLife South Africa. The venue was Durban's brand-new, high-tech International Conference Centre (the ornithologists warming the place up for the Non-aligned Movement conference the following week). Anyone who feels that ornithologists are best in moderate doses is advised not to go to an IOC: immersion among a swarm of well over a thousand bird researchers for a week certainly makes for an intense and rather exhausting experience. The next opportunity to network at this level will be in Beijing, China in 2002. Thanks to our various sponsors, BirdLife South Africa, the British Ornithologists' Union and the African Wildlife Foundation, for making the visit possible.

High NRG

The Nairobi Ringing Group continues with a busy and active programme. The Nairobi Arboretum has now taken over as the Constant Effort site from IUCN's Wasaa Centre in Langata, and regular ringing is also ongoing at the National Museums grounds. The group made excursions to Athi River, Magadi, Mida Creek and Arabuko-Sokoke, and the Aberdares — all trips with their own excitements and challenges. There have been substantial changes at the Museums riverside site — initially because the El Niño floods made off with a large chunk of it (and one mist-net, regrettably); later because of clearance in preparation for the new Nairobi Botanic Garden. This hasn't deterred the birds, though. Good catches have included a young Great Sparrowhawk, retraps of Common Fiscal and African Citril ringed during the groups' first sessions back in 1994, and African Black Duck and Giant Kingfisher — see the first-hand account below!

Titus Imboma is the new Nairobi Ringing Group co-ordinator following Colin Jackson's departure for the coast. The ringing group welcomes (serious) new members — anyone interested in joining should contact Titus.

Ringing in the river

"On 3 December 1998 at the NMK grounds the Nairobi Ringing Group made a spectacular advance in its species list by catching its first African Black Duck. The day before Titus Imboma and I put up nets as usual but with a small addition — one net *across* the Nairobi River intended solely to catch the duck, something that we had tried before with little success.

The following morning Tito opened the nets at 7 a.m., but it was not until the second net round at 8:00 a.m. that the exciting moment came. As I was approaching the two 12-m nets in the scrub I looked over the bush to see that the one across the river had some activity. I saw a big black bird struggling to free itself. My mind didn't think of the duck at first: I assumed it was just a polythene bag. But then... it was moving... and I increased my speed, shouting to Tito because I had remembered why we had set the net across the river — it was the duck!! "Tito! Run! The Duck! Bata! Bata! Tito!" I shouted as I ran towards the net, leaving the scrub nets that held only mousebirds.

The duck had been caught in the lower panel, flying downstream. I was wearing gum boots which didn't serve their purpose at all as my socks and trousers were soaked while trying to extract the bird. We removed it safely between the two of us, and I carried it to the ringing site in triumph, to surprise the other members. As word got out that we had caught a Black Duck members of the Ornithology Department flocked to the site to see our rare catch.

Tito gave the duck a D ring as well as a white colour band after a lot of agonising searching for a well-fitting non-corroding ring. It was a fully grown bird with a wing span of 820 mm.

It was a day for quality species because we also caught three migrants: two Willow Warblers and a Nightingale.

On 10 December 1998, we tried the same magic, managing to catch a duck again. Unfortunately this time the bird was too heavy for the weak guy ropes and the net fell, with the duck managing to free itself just as we were about to reach it. We put up the net again and were consoled by trapping another spectacular species — the Giant Kingfisher." — *Nicodemus Nalianya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

[Adapted from *Merops* (the newsletter of the Nairobi Ringing Group) — available from the Department.]

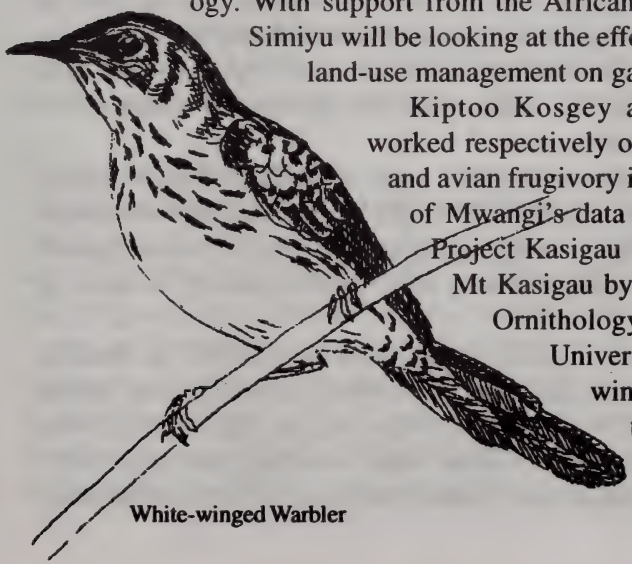
Advancing by degrees: updates on staff and students

Congratulations to Munir Virani and Brooks Childress for successfully defending their PhD theses at Leicester University; to Oliver Nasirwa and Wenceslas Gatarabirwa for completing their MSc degrees at the University of East Anglia; to Paul Matiku, Joseph Oyugi and Alfred Simiyu, whose MPhil theses satisfied the examiners at Moi University; and to Kiptoo Kosgey and Mwangi Githiru for completing their Masters' theses (they await examination) at Moi and Kenyatta, respectively.

Oliver and Wenceslas returned to Kenya in September 1998 for a year's independent research. Oliver and his field team (Richard Musina and Nicholas Nalianya) have been getting to grips with the papyrus swamps at Lake Kanyaboli, haunt of the threatened Papyrus Yellow Warbler among other special swamp species. Floating papyrus is a nerve-wracking habitat to work in: one can see why papyrus birds have been rather neglected by ornithologists! Wenceslas, assisted by Silvester Karimi, has been working in a very different environment — the moorland of the high Aberdares. This bleakly beautiful landscape is the stronghold of the Aberdare Cisticola, a little-known Kenyan endemic and Wenceslas's study bird.

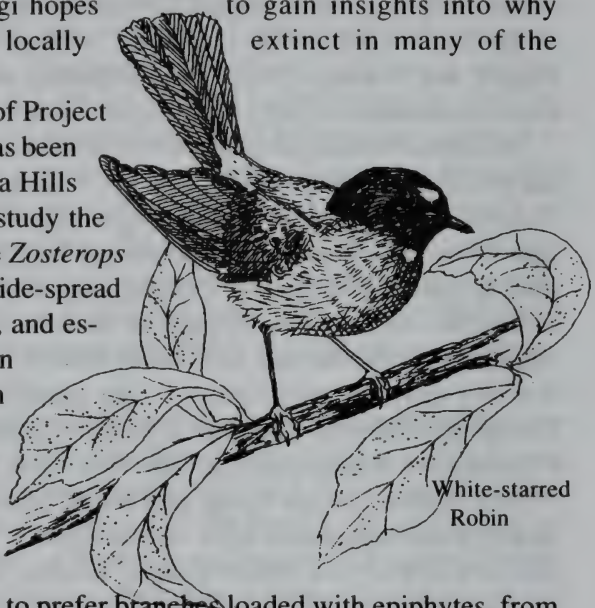
Paul Matiku, Joseph Oyugi and Alfred Simiyu studied the East Coast Akalat, Kakamega forest birds and sandgrouse populations, respectively. Simiyu will now join fellow Kenyan Muchai Muchane in Cape Town to work for his PhD at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of Field Ornithology. With support from the African Wildlife Foundation, Simiyu will be looking at the effect of different types of land-use management on game-bird demography.

Kiptoo Kosgey and Mwangi Githiru worked respectively on Turner's Eremomela and avian frugivory in the Taita Hills. Some of Mwangi's data were collected during Project Kasigau 1998, an expedition to Mt Kasigau by a joint team from the Ornithology Department and the University of East Anglia (and winner of the BP Expedition Award in the Tropical Forests category). Mwangi has been



White-winged Warbler

awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to the University of Oxford, where he intends to work for his PhD in zoology. He will be back in Kenya, however, for fieldwork on the White-starred Robin in...yes, the Taita Hills! By looking at the effects of forest fragmentation on a relatively widespread forest bird like the robin, Mwangi hopes to gain insights into why other species have become locally extinct in many of the fragments.



White-starred Robin

Another team member of Project Kasigau, Ronald Mulwa, has been back in the field in the Taita Hills (and in Kasigau again) to study the threatened Taita White-eye *Zosterops silvanus*. This is the most wide-spread of the Taita endemic birds, and especially abundant on Kasigau — it can be seen there in flocks of 150 or more. Mulwa's work shows that the white-eyes forage both high in forest trees and in scrub around the forest edge. They seem to prefer branches loaded with epiphytes, from which they glean tiny insects. Mulwa, who is working for his MSc at Kenyatta University, is supported by grants from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildlife Conservation Society, and by the Taita Hills Biodiversity Project. The white-eye field team currently includes Fred Barasa and George Eshiamwata.

Edward Waiyaki continued his PhD work on the Taita Thrush, after a visit to Antwerp University in April 1998. Six Department staff and interns were able to visit the project during August and September 1998 and gained valuable experience in radio-telemetry work (and in moving at speed up near-vertical hillsides...).

In October 1998 Peter Njoroge began work for his PhD at Reading University. He stayed in Reading for only a month before heading back to the tropics to start field-work on Seychelles Magpie Robins *Copsychus sechellarum* — one of the world's rarest birds — and has since spent half a year 'marooned' on Cousin Island where the species has been re-intro-

duced. Njoroge passed through the Department in May 1999 and gave an interesting seminar on the robins. His verdict on the Seychelles so far? "Too many mosquitoes and too much fish." However, he has now learned how to swim...

From June to August 1999 Department researchers George Amutete and Joseph Oyugi were, quite coincidentally, on separate training programmes in Chicago, USA. Amutete was based at the Field Museum of Natural History as a follow-up to a MacArthur biodiversity training course in Budongo Forest, Uganda the previous year. The main focus was collection management and taxidermy: we hope he will now be training all the staff how to make perfect study skins. Oyugi was taking part in a course on biodiversity conservation run by the Field Museum, Chicago Zoo and the University of Illinois.

Luca Borghesio pushed ahead with his work on northern Kenyan forests, with surveys in Leroghi Forest, the Karissia Hills and Mt Kulal (accompanied by Kariuki Ndang'ang'a), and a reconnaissance trip to the Ndotto Hills. Kariuki himself left the Taita Thrush project in September 1998 to take up the IBA Research Fellow position vacated by Peter Njoroge. Daina Samba stepped into his place in Taita; she has now won a Wellcome Trust Biodiversity Conservation Fellowship and leaves for her MSc course at Reading University this October. However, Daina will be returning to the hills after that to study the Taita Apalis — the most threatened of the Taita endemics.

Last but not least, Alfred Owino joined the Department in April 1998 as a Research Fellow with the waterbird count project. He will be a familiar face by now to anyone who has taken part in the counts.

'Fundamentals' forges on

The Department's regular programme of training courses continues. 'Fundamentals of Ornithology' nos. 4 and 5 were held at Elsamere Field Studies Centre, Naivasha, from 26 May to 2 June 1998 and 22–29 April 1999. The thirty-six participants included professional guides and naturalists, safari operators and birders interested in brushing up their skills. Several field visits were fitted in, to the lake, Hell's Gate and Kieni Forest (fortunately in drier weather than in 1997!), and the courses ended with the now-traditional ceremony where participants receive their 'scientific names'. For the first time, the 1999 course was organised together with Nature Kenya.

'Fundamentals' no. 6 is scheduled for the end of April 2000 — anyone who is interested should contact the Ornithology Department. An updated set of course notes is also available.

The field course 'An introduction to gamebird biology' also saw a successful repeat. The location switched from Kajiado to another district rich in gamebirds, Laikipia, at the Mpala Ranch Research Centre. From 24 April to 1 May 1998, 13 potential gamebird scouts from ranches and community projects in Laikipia, Samburu and Marsabit Districts were trained by a team led by Alfred Simiyu. Support came from the COBRA project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The course aimed to teach appropriate skills for gamebird monitoring and management, and also to demonstrate the potential of bird shooting for revenue generation.

Hot off the press

The following new research reports are available from the Ornithology Department:

No. 29. Distribution, densities and habitat preferences of three gamebird species on Imbirikani group ranch, Kajiado. (Matiku, P., Simiyu, A. & Bennun, L., 1998.)

No. 30. The avifauna and conservation status of South Nandi forest, Kenya. (Waiyaki, E., 1998.)

No. 31. Monitoring of waterbirds in central Kenya, July 1995 and January 1996. (Nasirwa, O., 1998.)

No. 32. Monitoring of waterbirds in central Kenya, July 1996 and January 1997. (Oyugi, J.O. & Owino, A.O., 1998.)

No. 33. Monitoring of waterbirds in Kenya, July 1997 and January 1998. (Oyugi, J.O. & Owino, A.O., 1998.)

No. 34. Monitoring of waterbirds in Kenya, July 1998 and January 1999. (Oyugi, J.O. & Owino, A.O., 1999.)

No. 35. Avifauna of the lower Tana River forests: a preliminary survey. (Oyugi, J.O. & Amutete, A., 1999.)

Bye-bye, CJ

Colin Jackson, our VSO Training and Records Officer, left the Department in April 1998 after almost four extremely full years. Happily there was no need for tearful good-byes, as Colin hasn't gone far — just a few hundred kilometres south-east, to Watamu. There he is busy setting up a bird ob-

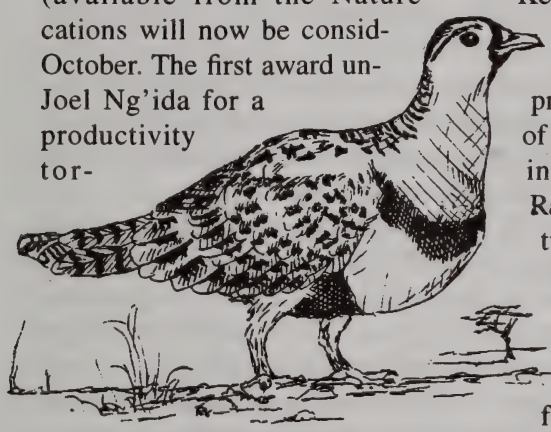
servatory, Mwamba, that will operate under the A Rocha Trust. Not that he isn't greatly missed: but CJ remains a Research Associate of the Department and an Editor of *Kenya Birds*, so we will be working very closely with him in the future.— *Leon Bennun.*

For more information about Mwamba Bird Observatory and A Rocha, contact Colin Jackson at P O Box 383, Watamu — e-mail cj-jacko@bigfoot.com.

Bird Committee

Small grants scheme

The Bird Committee has established guidelines for its small grant scheme (available from the Nature Kenya office). Short-listed applications will now be considered twice a year, in April and October. The first award under this scheme was made to Joel Ng'ida for a project entitled 'Abundance and productivity of gamebird populations at monitoring sites on Mbirikani Group Ranch, Kajiado District'. Unfortunately far more applications have already been received than the Committee can support — but it will try to put applicants in touch with other sources of funding where appropriate.



Black-faced Sandgrouse

Ngulia 1998

It was another busy ringing season at Ngulia... the following notes are extracted from a report compiled by Graeme Backhurst (Organiser, Ringing Scheme of Eastern Africa, P O Box 15194, Nairobi).

Although the first eight days yielded fewer than 500 migrants, the season eventually turned out to be the second best ever, with a total of 20,313 Palaearctic and 1,609 Afrotropical birds ringed — plus five ringed birds from four overseas schemes.

The first ringers arrived on 13 November, augmented on 15 November by a contingent from the National Museums plus the first of the season's

Earthwatch teams. They spent the first eight days and nights looking at the sky, refining the net rides, putting up more nets, studying bulbuls and somehow managing to catch and ring 472 migrants! The weather was to blame for this small number, with virtually no mist at night. All this changed from 22 November, when the mist did its stuff every night and good catches resulted, including three days each with over 2,000 birds.

As well as the usual Marsh Warblers and Sprossers, there were excellent numbers of Nightingales, Rufous Bush Chats, Iranias, Rock Thrushes, Spotted Flycatchers, Olivaceous, Olive-tree and Barred Warblers, Whitethroats and Red-backed and Red-tailed Shrikes. Unusual species included a magnificent female Eurasian Sparrowhawk (the second Ngulia record), two Corncrakes and an Asian Lesser Cuckoo.

Catches on the 27th and 24th (2,464 and 2,463) were the second and third highest ever — but still some way behind the record 3,131 ringed on 20 November 1995.

Conditions continued good after most of the group had left on 27 November, with over 2,000 more migrants ringed between then and 2 December despite the diminished manpower, very wet conditions and a nearly full moon.

The second session was from 15–26 December, when a Museums group, assisted by Earthwatch volunteers, ringed 7,000 more migrants. Numbers fell off along with the mist after 21 December. Marsh Warbler again predominated, followed by Whitethroat, Sprosser and River Warbler. There were very good numbers of some other warblers: Garden (55), Basra Reed (114), Great Reed (7) and Sedge (6 — there had been none in the first session). Exciting captures included a male Eurasian Sparrowhawk, a Eurasian Scops Owl and a Common Redstart.

The first session produced an amazing (and unprecedented) five birds with foreign rings. There were Marsh Warbler controls from the Netherlands (one) and Belgium (two), a Sprosser from Sweden (the first Swedish-ringed Sprosser to south of northern Egypt, and the longest and most northerly movement of any Ngulia bird), and an Italian Marsh Warbler found dead in the lodge. Only three birds ringed in previous Ngulia seasons were retrapped: a Sprosser and a Marsh Warbler in November which had been ringed in November the previous year, and a Whitethroat in December from December 1996.

Nightingales (138) and Common Rock Thrushes (59) were caught in record numbers this year, with second-best ever yearly numbers for

Corncrake (2), Tree Pipit (20), Rufous Bush Chat (144), Irania (683), Spotted Flycatcher (278), Basra Reed Warbler (173), Barred Warbler (151) and Willow Warbler (302).

It was the best-ever year for Afrotropical birds ringed — the total of 1,609 was 449 more than in 1995. The total included no fewer than 681 Common Bulbuls, which thronged the lodge during the first, dry week of the November session. From the proportion of ringed birds sighted around the lodge there were estimated to be about 1,500 bulbuls in the surrounding bush. Apart from the bulbuls, birds of interest included the second ever Black Cuckoo and the second and third ever Klaas's Cuckoos, six Grey-headed Kingfishers, eight Golden Pipits and five Grassland Pipits, three Red-capped Robin Chats, 11 African Paradise Flycatchers and 17 Somali Golden-breasted Buntings.

This season's efforts brought the number of Ngulia recoveries and controls to the respectable total of 105. There will surely be quite a few more to come — the 17,232 birds ringed in 1997 have brought in only one control so far, and there have been five from the 18,344 birds ringed in 1996. From past experience, recoveries and controls away from Ngulia often take several years to come in. (Since writing this we have just had notification of a Barn Swallow, ringed at Ngulia in December 1996 and controlled at the Chokpak Pass Ornithological Station in Kazakhstan in September 1998.)

Acknowledgements
Thanks are due to the lodge management, as always, to Kenya Wildlife Service, British Airways Assisting Conservation and Earthwatch. The Museums team wishes to thank the Kenya Museum Society and the Bird Committee of the EANHS, who each sponsored two ringers to participate.

A long way from home
Ringing organiser Graeme Backhurst reports two additional recent records, in addition to those in the Ngulia account above:

- A **Barn Swallow** ringed at Ngulia in December 1996 was controlled (i.e. recaptured and released) at Chokpak, Kazakhstan on 22 September 1998.
- A colour-ringed **Lesser Black-backed Gull** observed by Malcolm Wilson at Kazinga, Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda, on 18 and 19 January 1999. It had been ringed as a nestling at Sahalahti, Häme, Finland on 23 June 1996.

Raptor Working Group and Waterbird Working Group
The Bird Committee has agreed to set up working groups on raptors and waterbirds, to be co-ordinated by Munir Virani and Oliver Nasirwa respectively. Working groups tend to be only as effective as the people who are involved in them are enthusiastic — if you are interested in becoming involved in either group, please contact Munir or Oliver via the Department of Ornithology.

IBA bursary scheme
The Bird Committee has set up a fund to help support the secondary school education of needy students who are closely involved with IBA Site Support Groups, and who have the potential to contribute substantially to bird conservation in the future. **Several donations have already been received for the fund, but more are needed — if you would like to help, please contact the Nature Kenya office.** The first bursary recipient is Dominic Kamau Kimani, a student at Kimuri Secondary School who is one of the founder members of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau.

Nature Kenya

Strategic plan wrapped up
Nature Kenya finalised its four-year strategic plan in March 1999. The plan has seven major components, including identifying and documenting biodiversity priorities, and taking action for the protection of key species, sites and habitats. As far as birds are concerned, much of this work is already underway as part of the Important Bird Areas programme with Global Environment Facility support.

Important Bird Areas in Kenya
Work on the Important Bird Areas programme in Kenya has now really taken off. The programme works at two levels, local and national. Locally, it is stimulating conservation action at particular sites, especially by working with 'site support groups'. Nationally, it is linking up with other organisations to put IBAs on the conservation agenda. The main funding for the programme comes from the project "African NGO-Government Partnerships for Sustainable Biodiversity Conservation", which is supported by the Global Environment Facility through the United Nations Development Programme.

The two strands of the IBA programme are co-ordinated by Nature Kenya staff Solomon Mwangi (Sites Conservation Officer) and Paul Matiku (Conservation Promotion Officer). Both have been extremely busy since they began work in April 1998. A few highlights of the last year and a half are outlined below.

National Liaison Committee

The IBA National Liaison Committee developed out of the existing IBA Advisory Council. It provides a forum for discussing biodiversity conservation, bringing together more than 20 Government departments and non-government organisations involved in various ways with IBA conservation. The NLC has so far held five successful meetings.

Poster spreads the IBA message

Members of the NLC co-ordinated the design and production of a colourful IBA poster, targeted at schools and Government offices. It features Edwin Selempo's paintings of four IBAs with their special birds (Lesser Flamingo at Lake Turkana, Turner's Eremomela in South Nandi Forest, Jackson's Widowbird in the Kinangop Grasslands and Clarke's Weaver in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest). The poster was printed in October 1998 and so far around 4,000 copies have been distributed country-wide. A curriculum guide for schools has been produced to accompany the poster, so that it can be used effectively as a teaching aid.

SSG network growing

Nature Kenya is now working with local conservation groups at seven IBAs. These include the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association (Arabuko-Sokoke Forest), Burguret Youth for Conservation (Mt Kenya), Friends of Kinangop Plateau (Kinangop Grasslands), Kakamega Biodiversity Conservation and Tour Operators Association (Kakamega Forest), Kijabe Environment Volunteers (Kikuyu Escarpment Forest), North Lake Bird Trackers and South Lake Birdwatching Group (Lake Naivasha) and Sunset Birders (Lake Victoria). The programme is also collaborating with Rural Initiaves for Sustainable Development (RISDEV), an NGO working around South and North Nandi Forests.

These groups are diverse in their membership, history and activities. However, they also have many features (and challenges) in common. A workshop to bring them together was held at Naivasha from 19-21 No-

vember. Eighteen participants attended from six different site groups. This gave a chance for people to interact, share experiences and identify common problems. The links between groups have been consolidated since then by a number of exchange visits.

The groups are carrying out various work on the ground, including monitoring, awareness-raising and education. The Kakamega group has started an environmental education project with support from the African Bird Club. This focuses on schools next to the forest: members talk to schoolchildren about the forest and its importance, and guide them on forest walks so they can experience Kakamega's rich biodiversity at first hand. In Kinangop, the Friends are implementing a similar project with funding from the RSPB. As well as schools, they are targeting the wider community in an awareness campaign focused on Sharpe's Longclaw. This Kenyan endemic bird relies on tussocky grassland, the original habitat in Kinangop but one that is fast disappearing. Kinangop farmers own the land on which the longclaws live, so their support is vital if the birds are to be conserved.

Priorities for conservation action

Kenya has 60 IBAs, all of which need conservation attention. However, resources are scarce — we need to know where to concentrate our effort most urgently. To decide this, Nature Kenya organised a workshop to set priorities for action among the IBAs. Fourteen biologists and conservationists from eight institutions travelled to the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute, Naivasha on 7 December for a two-day get-together. Participants discussed and agreed on a methodology for setting priorities, before settling down to brass tacks and working through the list of sites. The result was a set of scores for threat and for biological importance — combining these gives a list of priorities. Sites were classed in three categories of priority, Critical, Urgent and High — it being recognised that all IBAs are, by definition, conservation priorities. Appropriate conservation actions were also suggested, some suitable for all sites (such as monitoring, and awareness-raising for decision-makers), others perhaps only feasible for the subset of Critical sites (such as Integrated Conservation and Development Projects).

Many of the sites on the Critical list are hardly surprises — they include Kakamega Forest, Mt Kenya and the Taita Hills forests, for example. Others have received much less conservation attention, such as the Mau Narok/

Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird

Molo Grasslands and Busia Grasslands. The analysis clearly shows that the most threatened habitats in Kenya are forests and grasslands — even though many forests are officially protected as Forest Reserves, this has not stopped extensive destruction and degradation.

Although extremely hard work for everyone who was there, the priority-setting workshop succeeded in setting a clear and justifiable agenda for IBA conservation — and in developing a straightforward methodology that can perhaps be applied elsewhere in Africa.

IBA databases take shape

Kariuki Ndang'ang'a has been busy collecting data for the Important Bird Areas paper and computer databases. The paper database now contains copies of literature on Kenya's 60 IBAs, and sits in a filing cabinet in the Nature Kenya office. Published or unpublished information on particular sites is often scattered and hard to locate, so the aim is to bring as much of it as possible together in one place — or at least to provide directions as to where it can be found. If you know of material on IBAs that may not be in the collection, Kariuki would be pleased to hear from you.

IBA directory on the way

The IBA directory lumbers on... The text and maps for the 60 site accounts were finished by March 1998. Unfortunately, there turned out to be major technical problems in translating the maps to the typesetting software being used. Solving these, and completing the introduction, took another full year. However, after several false starts, the directory is now *really* expected to go to press in September 1999. The original plan to produce it in full colour has been abandoned as too costly, but the illustrations (line drawings by Edwin Selempo and Brian Small) and tables will be in tasteful shades of blue. Watch this space...

Milk, grass and longclaws

Bird conservation is nowadays ever more enmeshed with wider issues of policy and economics. This is especially so outside protected areas. In the Kinangop Grasslands IBA, the grassland habitat that supports Sharpe's Longclaw and other grassland birds has been giving way rapidly to cultivation. Recent studies have estimated a conversion rate of between six and nine percent of grassland each year, which is startlingly high. What is driving this rapid change in land use?

To start obtaining a grip on this question, Nature Kenya invited two of the RSPB's experts on agriculture and land-use to visit the plateau. The idea was to develop a better understanding of the key issues surrounding agriculture and land use change in Kinangop, and map out what further research might be needed. Accordingly, Matt Rayment and Giovanna Pisano spend several days in early March 1999 with colleagues from Nature Kenya and the Friends of Kinangop Plateau. They spoke to farmers and dairy co-operative administrators, seeing at first hand the land-use issues on the plateau.

Although very preliminary, the findings bring some good news for Sharpe's Longclaw — dairy farming is likely to remain the dominant enterprise in Kinangop. Most farmers do not want to convert all of their land to arable production, as the risk of crops failing completely is to great. Problems in the dairy industry, mainly to do with milk marketing, have caused farmers to convert some of their land in order to diversify and avoid relying too much on one source of income.

Though dairy farming has become less attractive in the last decade, it remains the preferred enterprise for many farmers. It is less labour intensive and generally less difficult than arable farming on Kinangop. The conservation implications are clear — if the milk market became more attractive and reliable, the dairy sector would grow, and so would the incentives to maintain grassland as pasture. Nature Kenya is now working with the Friends of Kinangop Plateau and a local dairy co-operative to put together a project to improve milk cooling facilities. This would allow farmers to gain greater economic rewards from their livestock and discourage land conversion. Access to the facilities would also be tied in to mechanisms to ensure responsible land management that benefits the longclaws.

BirdLife International

Council of the African Partnership

There are now seven BirdLife Partner organisations in Africa: BirdLife South Africa, Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, Ghana Wildlife Society, Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, Nature Kenya, Nature Uganda, and the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania. Representatives of these organisations met as the newly-formed Council of the African Partnership at Mazvikadei, Zimbabwe, in June 1998, and at Kompiegna, Burkina Faso, in June 1999. Among other decisions, Partners recommended that BirdLife Zimbabwe, Naturama (Burkina Faso), the Nigerian Conservation Foundation and Association Les Amis des Oiseaux (Tunisia) become BirdLife Partners Designate. The Chair of Council for 1999/2000 is Souleymane Zeba of Naturama. At its June 1999 meeting, CAP also nominated Souleymane as Global Council member for the period 1999–2003, and Aldo Berruti (BirdLife South Africa) for election as Council Member-at-large. These nominations will be put forward for confirmation by the entire Partnership during the World Partnership meeting in Malaysia in October 1999.

BirdLife Seychelles receives GEF funding

Approval of the US$1 million Avian Ecosystems Management Project for the newly created BirdLife Seychelles Office has been received from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council via the implementing agency, the World Bank. The GEF Council will provide a grant of US$740,000 over the next three years and the Seychelles government will supply over $100,000 of field assistance, project accounting and administration input. BirdLife Seychelles will provide about $150,000 in scientific expertise and management input.

The aim is to restore the Granitic Seychelles Endemic Bird Area. It is one of the first medium-sized GEF projects to be approved. The project will include research on three critically threatened species, including Seychelles Magpie-Robin *Copsychus sechellarum*, and will undertake island assessments with subsequent restoration of at least one islands.

Satellite tracking of Black-faced Spoonbills

The first signals have been received from one of six critically threatened Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* fitted with a satellite transmitter. In May 1998, signals were received from a bird migrating through southern Zhejiang Province, China, from its wintering grounds in Taiwan where the transmitter was fitted.

So far, six birds have been fitted with transmitters in a joint tracking project. Three birds are being tracked from Tsangwen Estuary, Taiwan, and three from Mai Po Marshes in Hong Kong. The project has also colour ringed these birds, as well as a further 10 birds at Mai Po and one bird at Tsangwen.

Sightings of Black-faced Spoonbills in Kenya are unlikely — to say the least! But anyone who comes across one of these colour-ringed birds should report sightings to the Wild Bird Society of Japan (mj-ueta@netlaputa.ne.jp).

New BirdLife project at Mont Péko, Côte d'Ivoire

BirdLife is undertaking a new project at Mont Péko National Park, Côte d'Ivoire. The contract provides technical assistance for park management and a preliminary biological and socio-economic survey will aid planning of subsequent work. A key element will be to integrate surrounding populations into park activities.

Mont Péko is one of three protected areas being funded by the European Commission for an initial two years. The project forms part of a larger multi-donor programme co-ordinated by the World Bank and the PCGAP to revitalise the National Park sector in Côte d'Ivoire.

Mont Péko National Park is a small block (34,000 ha) of Upper Guinean Forest centred on a series of granite inselbergs. This habitat, forming one of Africa's two major lowland rainforest regions, originally covered most of Sierra Leone, south-east Guinea, Liberia, southern Côte d'Ivoire and south-west Ghana. It has now largely been cleared and the remaining forest is severely threatened.

As more surveys are carried out in the Mont Péko area, it is very likely to be recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA) — one of the species already found there is the vulnerable White-necked Rockfowl *Picathartes gymnocephalus*. This arresting bird, endemic to the Upper Guinea forest zone, breeds in small colonies in caves and on rock faces under rainforest cover. The discovery at Mont Péko is significant, as this is only the fourth known site for the species in Côte d'Ivoire.

Birding in... Embu

J. H. Burrell
Thika High School, Private Bag, Thika

[Editors' note: This article is based on J.H. Burrell's birdwatching in and around Embu from January 1974 to October 1982. Why are we publishing information that is nearly two decades 'out of date'? In part because it may help to focus attention on a part of Kenya that has been largely neglected by birdwatchers; also because much of the 'gen' may still be useful and valid; and because we would like to know what changes ***have*** *taken place since 1982. For that reason, too, we are listing the bird species in more detail than usual (for obvious reasons these records are unchecked!). If anyone does visit the sites described here, please write and let us know what you find in terms of habitat, routes and bird species... and we'll publish the details in future issues.]*

Dry country birds of Embu–Mbeere Districts

The Siakago Road

From the 'Isaac Walton Inn' drive down to Embu town and turn left at the Shell Garage along the Kitui/Siakago road. At a point approx 6 km from your start the Kitui road branches right — keep straight on for Siakago. From now on anything might turn up if you stop to check for it either side of the road, but two very good areas are to be found as follows:

1. Approximately 18 km from your starting point you will come to a small bridge. Cross over this and pull on the left. Walk anywhere in this area, following the course of the river bed (usually dry). The river can be crossed at several points and then a circular walk is possible to bring you back to the road and bridge.

2. Proceed for another 4 km and you reach another good area. Park at the side of the road and explore both sides.

These are rich sites, at which more than 185 species have been recorded. Some of the more notable ones include Peregrine, African Hobby, European Hobby, Common Kestrel, Wahlberg's Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Brown Snake Eagle, Shelley's Francolin, Black-bellied Bustard,

African Cuckoo, European Cuckoo, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Black-and-white Cuckoo, Levaillant's Cuckoo, Violet-crested Turaco, Brown Parrot, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Violet Wood Hoopoe, Bearded Woodpecker, Scarce Swift, Horus Swift, Tree Pipit, Hindes' Babbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Upcher's Warbler, Wood Warbler, Moustached Warbler, Green-capped Eremomela, Tiny Cisticola, Siffling Cisticola, White-headed Sawwing, White-crested Helmet-shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, European Golden Oriole, African Golden Oriole, Marico Sunbird, Mouse-coloured and African Penduline Tits, African Firefinch, Paradise Whydah and Broad-tailed Paradise Wyhdah. *[Editors' note: this last species was recorded from Meru District in the 1940s, but there are no other recent records from Kenya! — time to look again?]*

The Kitui road

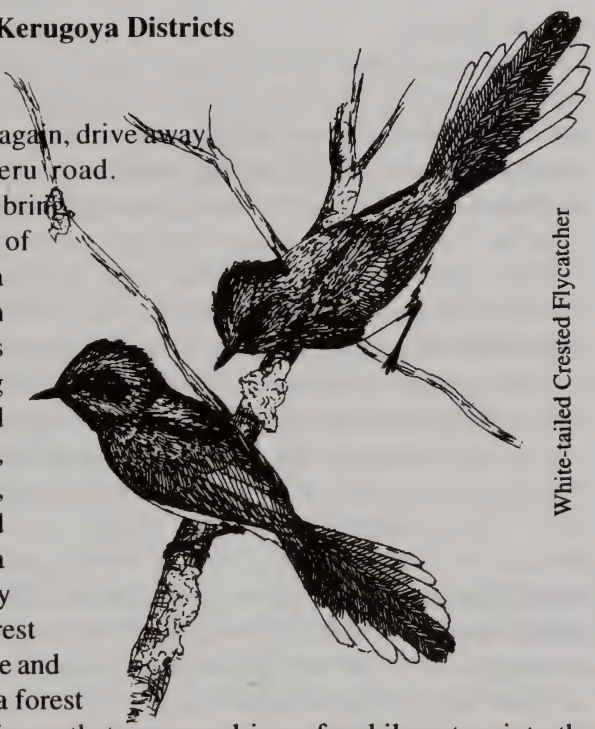
Along the Kitui road from the turn-off the species are generally similar, but with some notable additions such as Scaly Chatterer and Steel-blue and Straw-tailed Wyhdahs

The dams

From the 'Isaac Walton' a journey of about 53 km along the Kitui road will take you to Kamburu Dam. At the dam itself, park first on the Embu side and walk round the bush to the left and the foreshore to the right. Then park on the dam itself to scan the spillway to the left. Finally, cross the dam, park on the right and scan the bush and foreshore to the right. As well as the bush birds to be seen along the Siakago and Kitui roads, numerous waterbirds are likely including the two cormorants, Little, Yellow-billed and Great Egrets, Woolly-necked Stork, Water Dikkop and Giant Kingfisher.

Continuing towards Kitui for a couple of kilometres, a sharp left turn takes you to Kindaruma. Stop at the first small bridge over a **large** dry watercourse to look for Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Bare-eyed Thrush and Black-bellied Sunbird. Along the shoreline before Kindaruma Dam itself is reached there is usually a variety of waterbirds, including Three-banded and Spurwing Plover and (in season) numerous migrant waders. Osprey has also been recorded here. Notable birds in the scrub and bush include Banded Snake Eagle, Golden-breasted Starling and Northern Grey Tit.

Forest birds of Embu-Kerugoya Districts



White-tailed Crested Flycatcher

Irangi Forest

From the 'Isaac Walton' again, drive away from Embu on the Meru road. About 6 km travel will bring you to the small village of Mutindori. On the left, a well-defined murram road leads to St Mark's Teacher Training College. Follow this road towards the mountain, passing the college, Manyatta and Kianjakoma Tea Factories, and finally reaching the Irangi Forest barrier. One can park here and explore on foot, or find a forest worker to open the barrier so that you can drive a few kilometres into the forest. Numerous tracks and trails in the forest itself merit investigation. A full day is recommended for really good results: an early start can be very exciting if there has been some overnight rain during a dry spell. Interesting birdwatching can be guaranteed, but sightings can be slow and few and far between until one comes across mixed birds parties. The forest holds an excellent selection of highland forest and stream-side birds, including Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Mountain Buzzard, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Bronze-naped Pigeon, Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo, White-headed Wood-hoopoe, Bar-tailed Trogon, Fine-banded Woodpecker, Mountain Wagtail, Mountain Greenbul, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Black-throated Apalis, Black-headed Apalis, Brown Woodland Warbler, African Hill Babbler, Hunter's Cisticola, Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Montane Oriole, Kenrick's Starling, Waller's Starling, Olive Sunbird, Brown-capped Weaver, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Abyssinian Crimson-wing, Thick-billed seed-eater and Grey-headed Negro-finch.

Njikiini Forest

From the 'Isaac Walton' take the main Nairobi Road out of Embu and across the Rupengazi Bridge. On climbing the hill which bears left, look out for a murram turn to the right where there are a few small shops. Proceed straight towards the mountain, following two undulating 'S' bends to left to right. On approaching the third of these, you will notice a small patch of natural forest on your left as the road bends left; on the right is cleared pine trees, straight ahead is swamp and natural forest. On the edges one can see Brown-backed Scrub Robin, Rüppell's Robin-Chat, and Blue-headed Coucal. One has to walk through the forest as there are few well defined paths. Keep the swamp to your left and press on and up to meet a small stream; follow this to the right, and cross the stream by logs to enter a glade. Paths from this lead to pine forest, but by always bearing left one will eventually reach murram tracks and the main road, coming round in a circle back to one's car — recommended only for the intrepid and energetic! The birds are harder to see than at Irangi, fewer in number, and similar in composition. Notable species here are Lemon Dove, Narina's Trogon, Eastern Honeybird and Red-headed Bluebill. It is a pity that this largely unexplored and mysterious forest is so difficult to access as it must contain some rarities. Once by chance, when lost, I found a small lake and swamp area inside thick forest but could not reach the water's edge — since then I have been unable to rediscover it!

Castle Forest

Drive from Embu on the Nairobi road and at Samson's corner (12 km from town) turn sharp right on the Sagana road. Proceed for about 5 km, and just before Kutus take the right-hand tar road to Kirinyaga. About 6 km along this bear left onto murram and proceed on a rough road past Kabare Girls' School **straight** on to the forest (about 32 km from the tar in total). Continue into the forest for a few kilometres until the 'Castle' is reached. Park and look around. The birds are similar to a combination of those found at Njikiini and Irangi but do include some additional species, such as Red-headed Parrot, Sharpe's and Abbott's Starlings, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Taccazze Sunbird, Black-headed Waxbill and Yellow-crowned Canary.

Embu township and environs

The town

A variety of birds can be seen in and around the town centre, a useful viewing spot being the patio of the cafe at the back of the town hall. Around the treed area of the Provincial/District offices is a good spot to see Slender-billed Chestnut-winged Starlings.

The Isaac Walton

The gardens of the Isaac Walton hotel, just out of town on the Meru road, with their variety of flowers, plants, bushes and trees, attract a variety of birds. With a little effort a reasonably relaxed day can yield up to 50 species. Some notable species on the list include Little Sparrow Hawk, Scaly-throated Honeyguide and Garden Warbler.

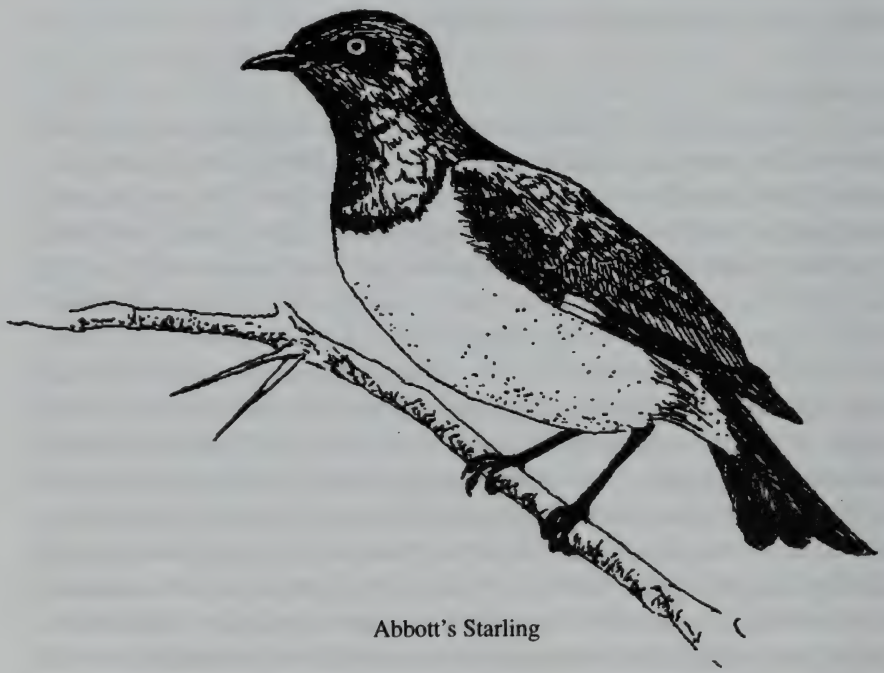
Kangaru School

About 1.5 km up the hill from the hotel is the large compound of Kangaru School with its farm land, coffee shamba and indigenous forest and bush, together with some fine jacaranda and eucalyptus trees. Turn right onto murram at the 'Staff houses' sign, then right again at the signpost and park off the lane. Walk down the lane, explore the school nature trail (on the left) cross the small stream, and proceed to the right through scattered bush into more open country. A stony outcrop affords a lovely view over Mbeere lands stretching out below and into the distance. Retracing one's steps, one comes back to a murram path (you will have crossed it on the outward journey.) If you go left up the hill you reach the D.D.C. houses on your right and have parkland, a nice pond and agricultural plots (on the Agricultural Research Station land) on your left. Winding Cisticola and African Water Rail occur at the pond. Follow the road to the tar and turn right to reach the Kangaru road to the right. Alternatively turn right at the murram road mentioned, go up the hill and then left through playing fields, bush, edge of forest and coffee, returning in a circle back to the road where the car is parked nearby. The staff houses' gardens are good for birds as well. Interesting species here include Bat Hawk, Lizard Buzzard, Scaly Francolin, African Wood Owl, Montane Nightjar, Lesser Honeyguide, Wahlberg's Honeybird, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Grey-Olive Greenbul and Red-faced Cisticola.

Agricultural Institute Farm Ponds

Opposite the entrance to the D.D.C (District Development Centre) and Kangaru Staff house road, both on the right, is a murram road to the left, with the farm entrances on the right hand. Inside are two ponds with a good variety of waterbirds, including African Darter, Purple, Common Squacco and Black-crowned Night Herons, Black Crake and African Reed Warbler.

Close to 400 species have been recorded in the general Embu area, though some of these are decidely unusual. The variety of habitats makes this a rich birdwatching site, and well worth exploring — especially with visits at different times of the year.



Abbott's Starling

Birding in... the Endashant Swamp

Mark Mallalieu
DFID, P O Box 30465, Nairobi

Where in Kenya might you see African Crakes and Dwarf Bitterns alongside Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes and Bare-eyed Thrushes? Possibly only in and around the Endashant swamp, just an hour's drive from Nairobi. Endashant is a seasonal swamp just beyond the Ngong hills. It lies in a shallow basin of about 209 hectares, between steep cliffs on one side and a long rocky outcrop on the other, in dry *Acacia-Commiphora* country sparsely populated by nomadic Maasai and their herds.

Being seasonal, the 'swamp' is, of course, often bone-dry. It appears to flood in years of good rains, probably from April or May, drying out again between July and October, depending on rainfall.

Getting there

Travel out to Ngong town, turning right at the T-junction in the town centre, then almost immediately bear right again where the road forks. Follow this road (dirt soon replaces tarmac, but it's usually passable by saloon car) round the edge of the Ngong hills and soon you are descending steeply across a hillside into Maasai country covered in camphor bushes ('olleleshwa' in Maa). Have your binoculars handy from here: you should see Schalow's Wheatears on the road down the hill and Northern Anteater Chats a bit further on. After 10.8 kms, bear right where the road divides again (there is a sheet-iron covered church on your right here), and turn left after another 5 kms where there is an old sign marked 'Ngong rifle range'. Park after 4.4 kms by a small fenced pond, put your wellies on and walk in the direction of the Ngong hills. A scramble down a rocky bush-covered slope brings you to the swamp.

The birds

The last 8 km or so of the drive to Endashant are particularly exciting. In the early morning, there are hordes of small birds by the roadside: White-browed Scrub Robins, Purple Grenadiers, Speckle-fronted Weavers, Grey-capped Social Weavers and Yellow-rumped Seed-eaters are typical, Green-

Rosy-patched Bush-shrike

winged Pytilias not infrequent, whilst abundant Grey Flycatchers and frequent Fawn-coloured Larks perch near the tops of the small trees. Capped Wheatears can sometimes be common in the open country just beyond the turning at the church, and Short-tailed Larks, Temminck's Coursers and Kori Bustards also occur here. There are three goodies to look out for in the better-wooded areas: Tiny Cisticolas (which sometimes perch conspicuously right on the tops of acacias), Southern Grosbeak Canaries (here at the northern edge of their range) and the very local Bush Pipit, whose small size is distinctive — but remember that Grassland and Long-billed Pipits also occur. Rocky outcrops hold Wailing Cisticolas, Cliff Chats and a pair or two of Common Kestrels and Augur Buzzards.

As you walk down towards the swamp, look out for the noisy and numerous Banded Parisomas, D'Arnaud's Barbets, Slate-coloured Boubous, Brown-crowned Tchagras and Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes. Once at the swamp, birds to be seen depend very much on the conditions. In dry periods, there may be Fischer's Sparrow-larks out on the dried mud. Depending on the time of year, pools of water attract breeding or migrant waders. If there is plenty of cover for their nests, Red-billed Teals and White-faced Whistling Ducks may be found escorting tiny ducklings. If there is an expanse of open water as well, herons and storks occur (12 species have been recorded), including African Spoonbills, Glossy Ibises and the 'secretive' Dwarf Bittern which, if flushed, will land and stand motionless on the top of an acacia. Occasionally a pelican drops in (but not for long, as there are

no fish). Whiskered Terns may be breeding, along with a few Maccoa Ducks and Black-necked Grebes (Little Grebes are far commoner, but the Great Crested Grebes which nested in the 1970s sadly no longer occur). If there is dense grass and sedge growth, a few Little Rush Warblers and even African Reed Warblers may arrive and there are lots of Winding and Zitting Cisticolas, together with Cardinal Queleas and a few Yellow-crowned Bishops.

When water is scarce, muddy pools attract droves of estrilid finches such as Cut-throat Finches, Crimson-rumped, Black-faced and Common Waxbills, and Grey-headed Silverbills, along with other small birds like Straw-tailed Whydahs.

But the star birds are the rails, eight species of which have been found recently. When conditions are right, Common Moorhens, Red-knobbed Coots, Black Crakes and African Water Rails breed, whilst Lesser Moorhens may do so. In the wet grassy margins, migrant African Crakes occur in May to July, sometimes in surprising numbers. But the two top birds are very hard to find, since they occur in deeply-flooded stands of grass and sedge and are notoriously difficult to flush. These are the enigmatic Striped Crake (not called *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis* for nothing!) and the tiny Baillon's Crake. Both species were present during May to July 1998, when the conditions may well have been exceptionally suitable. If you find flooded grassland, walk along the margins and hope that luck is with you! Avoid repeatedly 'thrashing' one area, though, as this will damage the vegetation.

The wooded country around the swamp edge should not be neglected. Here there are Spotted Morning Thrushes, Grey Wren-warblers, Nubian Woodpeckers, White-headed Saw-wings, Beautiful Sunbirds and two more 'specials': Red-throated Tits and Bare-eyed Thrushes, though neither can be guaranteed. Along the cliff-face on the far side of the swamp are breeding Egyptian Vultures, Lanner Falcons and occasional Verreaux's Eagles, together with flocks of Nyanza and Mottled Swifts. Nocturnal birds of the cliffs include Freckled Nightjars and Spotted Eagle Owls.

A final note

If you want to know more about the ecology of this strange and wonderful place, read the fascinating accounts by G.R. Cunningham-van Someren and Dave Richards in the Bulletins of the EANHS (1977, September/October and Vol 22(4) of December 1992).

Records

compiled by Colin Jackson
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This section exists for the publication of interesting observations and for updates to *A Bird Atlas of Kenya* (Lewis & Pomeroy, 1989). All contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for *Kenya Birds*, please consider the following guidelines. For (non-breeding) records of Afrotropical, oceanic and Palaearctic birds, please send in any observations with notes that you think are of interest, e.g. early / late dates for Palaearctic and intra-African migrants, unusual records for your area, or any unusually large or impressive movements of birds. We are keen to publish information of this kind. Records with information other than simply a list of birds are particularly interesting and valuable, e.g. "male singing from bush", or "4 seen in flock of Barn Swallows...", or "single adult and 2 immatures roosting with other terns" etc... The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. *All* records are useful for supplementing the computerised database held in the Dept. of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, through which our knowledge of bird distribution and seasonality in Kenya will be improved.

For breeding records, those of *confirmed* breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of *probable* breeding (nest-building, courtship etc.) are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. For definitions and codes of 'confirmed' and 'probable breeding', see *Kenya Birds* vol. 5(2), p. 82. Interesting records will be published here and the others stored by the EANHS for analysis of breeding seasons, success rates, habitat requirements etc. You are strongly urged to fill in a Nest Record Card at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page).

For all records, including breeding records, please be as detailed as possible about dates and locations. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude of the site to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these as we update *A Bird Atlas of Kenya*.

Supporting details and descriptions are always welcome for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication (see *Kenya Birds* vol. 4(2), p. 84 for suggestions on how to submit a record). Records of certain species in particular are requested for inclusion in this report. These species are indicated in the new *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (EANHS 1996, available for KSh 100/= from the

EANHS office) and records should be sent to the Records Officer at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya. For particularly unusual sightings, supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the Rarities Committee of the EANHS before the record can be accepted.

Key to records

For new atlas records, the species number as given in the atlas is placed in brackets after the name: e.g. Whinchat (A# 653). The new records themselves are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres,** present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf,** confirmed breeding; **post conf,** confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. [conf 25B] indicates that the species is confirmed as breeding (and is therefore also present) in square 25B. Where scientific names are not stated (here and elsewhere in *Kenya Birds*) the English names follow the *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (3rd edition), EANHS, Nairobi 1996.

Overview

'Water' seems to have dominated the scene for much of the period covered by this report. The shadow of *El Niño* fell darkly on the region, bringing the incredible amount of rain that swamped us from October 1997 until the long rains in May 1998. This led to vast areas of open water and flooded seasonal swamps in many parts of Kenya. For many people this was a disaster, but for wetland birds it was a 'gift from above' (literally!). Interestingly however, the numbers of wetland birds were extremely low at the 'normal' sites country-wide, notably at the annual waterfowl census sites in the Rift Valley. Where had they all gone? With a number of records of wetland species turning up in 'desert' and savannah habitats, e.g. Black-headed Heron and Knob-billed Duck near Lokichogio and African Black Duck on the Athi Plains, it would seem likely that they dispersed nationwide, spreading over much larger areas than usual to exploit the abundance of newly created wetland habitat. At the coast, the excessive rain turned the 'dry' coastal forest of Arabuko-Sokoke into a wetland heaving with frogs and waterbirds, including the first Lesser Moorhen for the forest. Flufftails continued to be turned up by our resident crake specialists with a Streaky-breasted being found near Thika yet again. Seasonal swamps in the Rift Valley were brimming with water and attracted good numbers of waterbirds, illustrated by new records from pools in the Rift east and south of Magadi near the Meto Hills. All round it has been a 'waterbird year'.

Another major event feature was World Birdwatch at the beginning of October 1997. For this, teams spread out all over the country and as many species as possible were recorded (see *Kenya Birds* vol. 6). This led to a flood of records including an impressive 80 new Atlas records. Highlights of the Birdwatch records include the re-discovery of the Black-and-white Flycatcher at Shimoni after 40 years or more, two Great Snipe (one in western Kenya and the other at the now well-visited Githumbwini Estate dam near Thika) and the first Grasshopper Buzzard record for western Kenya.

The flycatcher is the most spectacular of a set of species that have turned up recently after remaining unrecorded for long periods. A Sabine's Spinetail seen low along one of the forest tracks in Kakamega in late November 1997 is the first for many years — an intensive survey of the forest in 1996 failed to find them and the species was thought to be extirpated (i.e. locally extinct). Grey Parrots continue to be reported in ever increasing numbers from Kakamega too, this time 11 from Rondo Retreat Centre which is also encouraging considering the intensive pressure that the forest is under. A pair of Orange-winged Pytilia in the Shimba Hills in August 1997 is also the first record of this species at the coast since December 1990, though the species has been seen more regularly in its regular western Kenya site, west of the Kongelai Escarpment. In that same area near Makutano, however, the site for the Spotted Creeper is fast becoming degraded with trees cut down and undergrowth cleared, so that it is becoming much harder to find the Creeper — and there are not many other sites known for this bird.

Birders visiting the Lokichogio area recorded a number of interesting species including White-rumped Swift — a long way from anywhere it has been previously seen and most likely a wanderer, Grey-headed Silverbill, Steel-blue Whydah (presumably from the population in north-east Uganda) and the two wetland species mentioned above. A Lesser Kestrel seen in March 1998 in the same area was also a new Atlas record, though it fits with most other sightings in being during the northward migration and in the Rift Valley / western Kenya.

The Violet-tipped Courser in Mara is a noteworthy record. This scarce species is thought to be mostly an intra-African migrant from the southern tropics, but due to its nocturnal habits and low numbers is rarely seen. Most records have been from further east, notably the Tsavo region down to the coast, making this record particularly unusual. Another relatively

little-known and seldom-seen species is the Common Button-quail, for which there is a breeding record from Lewa Downs near Isiolo (an adult with young).

Finally, there were a number of interesting Palaearctic records. A Red-necked Phalarope turned up in the 'usual' site at Lake Nakuru but a Terek Sandpiper in Amboseli was out of the ordinary — all previous inland records are from the Rift Valley. Observers studying Taita Thrushes in the Taita Hills were distracted by a Chiffchaff singing overhead one day in February 1998, again a very unusual record for this uncommon species, which is normally recorded in the central highlands. One of the less common Palaearctic migrant raptors, the Eurasian Honey Buzzard, distracted the same observers in the Taitas, and two together were seen low overhead near Busia on the World Birdwatch weekend in October. These are both good records for this interesting bird. A Corncrake at the end of January 1998 on the Athi plains is an odd record as this uncommon species is more of a passage migrant than a wintering one. However, the date suggests the bird was possibly wintering in the area.

Overall it has been a good period with a number of interesting observations that continue to build up the picture of the distribution and status of the birds in Kenya. Many thanks go to those who submitted records — please continue to do so!

Afrotropical species

Audubon's Shearwater: Watamu, offshore from Blue Lagoon, 1/1/98, TB — these beautiful seabirds are only seen offshore and are therefore not frequently reported.

Long-tailed Cormorant (A# 22): [pres 101A] Tsavo East NP, 4–5/10/97, JC

Rufous-bellied Heron: 21/6/98, Musiara Swamp, Masai Mara, WO, MB — a regular site for this species

Yellow-billed Egret (A# 38): [pres 114C] Funzi-Wasini Island area, Shimoni, 4–5/10/97, DF

Black-headed Heron (A# 43): [pres 2C] 15 on plains E of Lokichogio, 20/6/98, MM — probably an El Niño-related occurrence in this normally arid area; these birds are a long way from where they are usually recorded nearer L. Turkana.

Saddle-billed Stork: Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 4/10/97, KM

Glossy Ibis (A# 56): [pres 51C] Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 4/10/97, KM

African Spoonbill (A# 57): [pres 61B] Rongai, Rift Valley, 4/10/97, J&HO

White-faced Whistling Duck (A# 62): [pres 76C] Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 4/10/97, WV, TM; [pres 51C] Kahurura Forest, William Holden Education centre, Nanyuki, 4–5/10/97, FM

Knob-billed Duck (A# 66): [pres 2C]

1 on plains E of Lokichogio, 20/6/98, MM — this bird would probably have been attracted to this unusual area due to the El Niño rains that flooded many areas.

African Black Duck: Athi plains flooded by El Niño, early 1/98, ST — the El Niño not only caused confusion and chaos on the Kenyan roads, but also confused this duck, normally found on forested highland rivers but here observed out in the middle of savanna grassland — *flooded* grassland, mind you!

Maccoa Duck: Nanyuki, 4/10/97, LC

African Marsh Harrier (A# 98): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM; Nyambene, Meru NP, 20/6/98, WO, MB

Grasshopper Buzzard (A# 120): [pres 48C] Madende Bridge, 3 km W of Sio river, Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM; [pres 36D] 1, Kanyarkwat, Kapenguria, 9–13/10/97, BF — these are the first records of this species in W. Kenya.

Martial Eagle (A# 123): [pres 87D] Torosei, in Rift Valley on the Tanzanian border, 4/10/97, PR, SR, SM

Grey Kestrel (A# 153): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

Streaky-breasted Flufftail (A# 188): [pres 76A] 1 singing, wet grassland W of Thika, 14/2/98, MM

African Crake (A# 191): [pres 51C] near dam, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 15/6/98, WO, MB; around Musiara air strip, Masai Mara, 22/6/98, WO, MB

Allen's Gallinule (A# 199): [pres 63C] 1 imm, Githumbwini dam, Thika, 23/5/98, MM — this is a good site to find this species; the immature bird was not young enough to suggest it bred locally - it could have been a migrant from further south.

Lesser Moorhen: Githumbwini dam, Thika, 5/10/97, WH; an immature bird caught at night in very flooded (El Niño!) old sand quarry pools, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Watamu, 2/11/97, TB, CJ — the first record of this species for the forest.

Red-knobbed Coot (A# 197): [pres 37C] Keringet Dam, 5/10/97, CJ, PN, OM, MS; Githumbwini dam, Thika, 5/10/97, WH; [post pres 76C] Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 4/10/97, WV, TM — 3 new atlas records is unusual for a well-known and often common species, especially the two near the well-watched region of Nairobi.

African Finfoot (A# 202): [pres 62C] Kigio farm, Ilkek, nr Gilgil, 5/10/97, CC — a nice record for this elusive species

Spotted Thick-knee (A# 275): [pres 87D] Torosei, Meto Hills, Rift Valley on Tanzanian border, 4/10/97, PR, SR, SM

Violet-tipped Courser (A# 281): [pres 74A] single bird near Intrepids airstrip, Masai Mara, 5–6/3/98, DR — this courser is very infrequently reported as it is local, scarce and strictly nocturnal.

Three-banded Plover (A# 235): [pres 63C] Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 5/10/97, WH, MM

Blacksmith Plover (A# 217): [pres 61B] Rongai, Rift Valley, 4/10/97, J&HO

Black-headed Plover (A# 219): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, MS, CJ, PN, OM

Gull-billed Tern (A# 301): [pres 51C] Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 4/10/97, KM — an unusual inland record for this species being away from the Rift Valley.

Brown Noddy: just beyond reef offshore from Blue Lagoon, Watamu, 2/2/98, TB — another pelagic seabird that is not frequently reported.

Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (A# 326): [pres 101D] single M, Taita Ranch, S-E of Voi, 7/5/98, ES, FK

Feral Pigeon (A# 232): [pres 62C] Fisherman's Camp, Naivasha, 26/4/98, PRu

African Mourning Dove (A# 329): [pres 76B] Tiva, nr Kitui, 4/10/97, RM

Dusky Turtle Dove (A# 332): [pres 63C] Githumbwini dam, Thika, 5/10/97, WH, MM

Grey Parrot: 11 birds together in trees, Rondo Retreat Centre gardens, Kakamega Forest, 30/11/97, SE, WE — having gone unreported in Kakamega for some years, this species seems to have made a small comeback over the past year.

White-bellied Go-away-bird (A# 354): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c.30 km Kapenguria, 5/10/97, CJ, PN, OM, MS

Klaas's Cuckoo (A# 373): [pres 49B] Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Yellowbill (A# 379): [pres 48C] in riverine scrub, Madende Bridge, 3 km of W Sio river along Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM — this unique bird is quite scarce in western Kenya; single bird, Langata, Nbi, 15/2/98, ALA

Black Coucal (A# 378): [pres 63A] Karatina, 9/6/98 & [pres 74A] Musiara gate, Masai Mara 18/6/98, WO, MB — one of the least known of our coucals.

Blue-headed Coucal: Aberdare NP, 10/6/98, WO, MB — a local and shy bird in the central highlands that is not so frequently reported.

Sabine's Spinetail: single bird observed flying low up and down track in forest, Kakamega, 29/11/97, SE, WE — this is the first record in Kenya for over ten years of this rare species of swift, which was thought to be locally extinct in Kakamega.

White-rumped Swift (A# 422): [pres 2C] Lokichogio-Kakuma rd, 9 km towards Kakuma, 22/3/98, JM, MJ-D — a long way from any previous records, this bird was presumably a wanderer.

White-headed Mousebird: nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu Hills, 4-5/10/97, SC

Giant Kingfisher (A# 430): [pres 114C] Funzi-Wasini Island area, Shimoni, 4-5/10/97, DF — an unusual species for the coast, this bird would have been a wanderer from inland, maybe Mt Kilimanjaro.

Pied Kingfisher (A# 431): [pres 51C] Loldiaga Hills, Nanyuki, 28-30/5/98, DB

Green Wood-hoopoe (A# 459): [pres 87D] Torosei, on Tz border, 4/10/97, PR, SR, SM

Violet Wood-hoopoe (A# 460): [post pres 52C] Rujerewo River, on doum palms, Nyambene, Meru NP, 11-13/6/98, WO, MB

Hemprich's Hornbill (A# 473): [pres 36D] Cheptuya, Kanyarkwat, 4/10/97, MS, CM

African Grey Hornbill (A# 475): [pres 63A] Chogoria, Mt. Meru, 4-5/10/97, ND

Silvery-cheeked Hornbill: nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4-5/10/97, SC — a fascinating species, such a large bird and yet almost unknown to breed in Kenya — is it a non-breeding migrant from Tanzania in fact? Has anyone ever seen any 'migrating'?

Grey-throated Barbet (A# 489): [pres 37C] Sirikwa Farm, Kitale, 4/10/97, MS, CM; [pres 49B] in a small forest patch that is quickly being destroyed, Kessup, 6 km east along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ — the Kessup record is right at the eastern border of this species' range in Kenya.

White-eared Barbet: nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4-5/10/97, SC — not a commonly reported species.

Brown-breasted Barbet: pair seen foraging, Yale, Taita Hills, 4/2/98, LL — a mostly coastal species, it extends inland in small numbers as far as Taita.

Red-and-yellow Barbet (A# 499): [pres 36D] Cheptuya, Kanyarkwat, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

D'Arnaud's Barbet (A# 497): [pres 36D] Cheptuya, Kanyarkwat, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

Lesser Honeyguide (A# 501): [pres 62D] Kijabe, 4/10/97, CD; [pres 49B] single bird, Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Eastern Honeybird: Kijabe, 4/10/97, CD — only recently recorded from this QSD (62D), this is our second report.

Wahlberg's Honeybird (A# 509): pres 63C] 1 in open bushland with scattered trees near Thika, 23/1/98, MM

Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark: around Meru Mulika Lodge, Nyambene, Meru NP, 13/6/98, WO, MB

Ethiopian Swallow (A# 554): [pres 2C] Lokichogio-Kakuma rd, 9 km towards Kakuma, 22/3/98, JM, MJ-D — this observation is some distance west of the species' previously recorded distribution in Kenya.

Red-rumped Swallow (A# 556): [pres 2C] Lokichogio-Kakuma rd, 9 km towards Kakuma, 22/3/98, JM, MJ-D — a very long way from any other Kenyan localities for this species, this is most likely to have been a bird wandering from a northern population.

Rock Martin (A# 560): [pres 49B] several around cliff-faces, Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Mountain Wagtail (A# 833): [pres 49B] on fast-running stream, Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Cape Wagtail (A# 834): [pres 62B] Ndaragua forest, along Pesi river, N of Aberdare Mts, 4–5/10/97, NG, CG

Bush Pipit: Rift Valley W of Ngong Hills, 4/10/97, WH, MM

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul (A# 618): [pres 62C] Kigio farm, Ilkek, near Gilgil, 5/10/97, CC

Mountain Greenbul (A# 615): [pres 62C] Kigio farm, Ilkek, near Gilgil, 5/10/97, CC

Stripe-cheeked Greenbul: nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4–5/10/97, SC — a very restricted species in Kenya,

mainly found on the Taitas and on Chyulu

Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul: Kamburu, near Mwea NP and Makima town, 5/10/97, TL — this record is at the E border of this species' range in K.

Rufous Chatterer (A# 595): [pres 36D] Cheptuya, Kanyarkwat, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

Grey-winged Robin: Sirikwa Farm, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

Brown-backed Scrub Robin (A# 657): [pres 37C] Lokitela farm, Kitale, 4/10/97, JMw, NN — an uncommon species anyway, there are relatively few records from around Kitale.

Lesser Swamp Warbler (A# 696): [pres 37C] Keringet Dam, Makutano, Kapenguria, 5/10/97, CJ, PN, OM

Brown Woodland Warbler: nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4-5/10/97, SC

Little Rush Warbler (A# 682): [pres 51C] Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 4/10/97, KM

Broad-tailed Warbler (A# 686): [post pres 63C] 1 flushed from wet grassland W of Thika, 8/3/98, MM

Long-tailed Cisticola (A# 732): [pres 74C] Siana Springs, Masai Mara NR, 7/11/97, GO — a local and uncommon species recorded here at the eastern edge of its range.

Foxy Cisticola: several birds including a juv, Kanyarkwat, Kongelai, Makutano, end of 1/98, CJ, JS, I&HM

Black-headed Apalis(A# 757): [pres 51C] NE Nanyuki, 5/10/97, LS, JH

Black-collared Apalis (A# 758): [pres 50C] around waterfalls, Nyahururu, 4/10/97, NG, CG; [pres 49B] Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Grey-capped Warbler (A# 763): [pres 49B] Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Red-faced Crombec (A# 771): **[pres 76B] Yatta area, Tiva, Kitui, 4/10/97, RM**

Green Crombec: Madende Bridge, 3 km W of Sio river along Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM — this delightful little bird is restricted in Kenya to just this area around Busia.

White-bellied Tit (A# 583): [pres 48C] Madende Bridge, 3km W of Sio river, Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM

Spotted Creeper: Sirikwa Farm, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM — this species has really only been known regularly from the tiny patch of forest (literally a few trees) near Sirikwa Farm, but that patch is now seriously under threat of destruction for crops — in fact since this record the bird has been seen very infrequently.

Black-and-white Flycatcher: adult M observed in canopy of forest trees, Shimoni, 4/10/97, SB, MH; this species was thought to no longer on the coast, this record being the first for c. 40 years.

Taita Fiscal: Rift Valley W of Ngong Hills, 4/10/97, WH, MM — a very northern record for the southern population of this species.

Brubru (A# 835): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, CJ, PN, OM

Red-naped Bush Shrike: 1 observed flying across main rd and perching in bush beside it, 15 km E of Voi, 11/2/

98, LL — a typical area for this infrequently reported species.

Black-headed Gonolek: Lake Baringo, 4–5/10/97, SL — this bird was probably a 'wanderer' from further west.

Cape Rook (A# 580): [pres 2C] single bird, 40 km E of Lokichogio, 20/6/98, MM — this species is normally confined to nearer L. Turkana and not found so far west.

Waller's Starling (A# 887): Turi, Molo, 4/1/97, IL; [pres 62C] Kieni forest, south of Aberdare Mts, 5/10/97, DT — one of our lesser-known forest starlings.

Slender-billed Starling (A# 886): [pres 61B] Turi, Molo, 4/1/97, IL; [pres. 49B], flock of 25–30 birds foraging on rocks covered with fast-flowing water at top of a waterfall, Kessup, 6 km east of main rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Lesser Blue-eared Starling (A# 880): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, MS, CJ, PN, OM — this starling is the commonest starling in the area.

Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling (A# 881): [pres 51C] Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 4/10/97, KM — this record is slightly out of the normal range and probably represents a wanderer from further west; [pres 88D] nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4–5/10/97, SC

Shelley's Starling: many at Gala Camp, nr Taita, for c.1 month, from 1/7/98, ES

Superb Starling (A# 890): [pres 60A] ICIPE field station, Mbita Point, 5/10/97, GA: [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, CJ, PN, OM, MS

Golden-breasted Starling (A# 893): [pres 88D] nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4–5/10/97, SC

Fischer's Starling (A# 891): [pres 76B] Yatta area, Tiva, Kitui, 4/10/97, RM

Magpie Starling: behind Lokichogio airport, 22/3/98, JM, J&SH

Wattled Starling (A# 899): [pres 63C] Githumbwini dam, Thika, 5/10/97, WH, MM

Olive Sunbird (A# 929): [pres 49B] Kessup, 6 km E along main rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Marico Sunbird (A# 916): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, CJ, PN, OM, MS

Malachite Sunbird: nr Chyulu gate, S. Chyulu hills, 4-5/10/97, SC — this record represents the small, isolated population of this species on the Chyulu Hills.

House Sparrow (A# 992): [pres 101A] surrounding farmland nr Wundanyi, Taita Hills, 4–5/10/97, DG, PM; [pres 62C] Ol Kalou, nr Gilgil, 1/2/98, FN — this introduced species is continuing to spread...

Rufous Sparrow (A# 991): [pres 76B] Yatta area, Tiva, Kitui, 4/10/97, RM

Yellow-spotted Petronia (A# 995): [pres 76B] Yatta area, Tiva, Kitui, 4/10/97, RM

White-browed Sparrow Weaver (A# 997): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

Speckle-fronted Weaver (A# 996): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM

Black-necked Weaver (A# 963): [pres 60A] Rusinga Island, Mbita, 4/10/97, GA; [pres 75B] Rift Valley W of Ngong Hills, 4/10/97, WH, MM

Heuglin's Masked Weaver (A# 955): [pres 36D] c. 50 nests counted in trees around GSU camp, Kanyarkwat, c. 30 km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, MS, CJ, PN, OM — this rare weaver seemed to appreciate the safety of nesting in the middle of an army camp!

Green-winged Pytilia (A# 1008): [pres 75B] Rift Valley W of Ngong Hills, 4/10/97, WH, MM — this record is slightly out of the species' normal range, being further north up the Rift than is usual.

Orange-winged Pytilia (A# 1009): M and F seen together in Shimba Hills National Park, 4/8/97, SE, WE; [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, c.30 km W of Kapenguria, 5/10/97, SM, CJ, PN, OM; 5–6 birds, same site end 1/98, CJ, JS, I&HM — this is a restricted species and difficult to find, and of late has been mainly reported from the Kanyarkwat site. The coastal observation is valuable – there have been few coastal records in recent years, the last being in December 1990.

Red-billed Firefinch (A# 1018): [pres 76D] Yatta area, Tiva, Kitui, 4/10/97, RM

African Firefinch (A# 1022): [pres 60A] Mbita point field station, ICIPE, 5/10/97, GA

Crimson-rumped Waxbill (A# 1031): [pres 62B] Ndaragua forest, along Pesi river, N of Aberdare Mts., 4–5/10/97, NG, CG

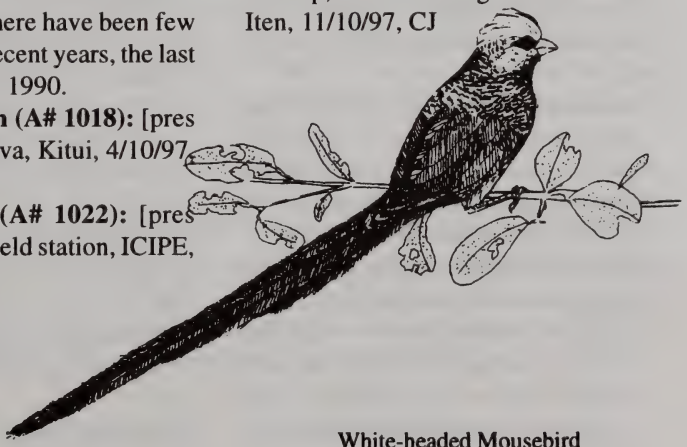
Blue-capped Cordon-bleu (A# 1025): [pres 75B] Rift Valley W of Ngong Hills, 4/10/97, WH, MM — a very northern record for the southern K/Tz population.

Grey-headed Silverbill (A# 1045): [pres 2C] behind Lokichogio airport, 22/3/98, JM, J&SH — this species is much more uncommon in the arid north than further south, making this a very interesting record.

Black-and-white Mannikin (A# 1042): [pres 49B] Kessup, 6 km E along main rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Steel-blue Whydah (A# 1033): [pres 2C] behind Lokichogio airport, 22/3/98, JM, J&SH — another record a long way from any previous ones, but birds have been recorded from north-east Uganda suggesting this refers to birds of that population.

African Citril (A# 1054): [pres 49B] Kessup, 6 km E along main rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ



White-headed Mousebird

Palaearctic migrants

Osprey (A# 141): [pres 60A] ICIPE, Mbita Point, 5/10/97, GA; single bird, Nbi NP, 8,9 & 13/6/98 — this would be one of the few over-summering non-breeding birds that are known to occur each year, though they are not often recorded around Nbi.

Common Buzzard: Madende Bridge, 3 km W Sio river along Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM

Eurasian Honey Buzzard (A# 137): [pres 101B] ad soaring, Chawia, Taita Hills, 3/2/98, LL; 2 birds low overhead, Madende Bridge, 3 km W of Sio river, Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM

Montagu's Harrier: ad male, Naro Moru, 9/10/97, BF — a relatively early record for this species

Eurasian Hobby (A# 152): [pres 36D] Kanyarkwat, Kapenguria, 4/10/97, MS, CM; over 25 birds flying south, 6/11/97, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, JW

Lesser Kestrel (A# 160): [pres 63A] single male, Naro Moru, 9/10/97, BF; [pres 2C] Lokichogio-Kakuma rd, 9 km towards Kakuma, 22/3/98, JM, MJ-D

Corncrake (A# 192): [pres 76C] Game Ranching Ltd., Athi River, 28/1/98, ST — an unusual date for this species which is considered a passage migrant: could it have been wintering here?

Caspian Plover (A# 233): [pres 54C] 3 birds nr Dadaab refugee camp, NE of Garissa, 14/1/98, MM — very little birding has been done in this area, these birds are likely to have been northward-bound migrants heading for their breeding grounds.

Common Snipe (A# 249): [pres 63C] Githumbwini dam, Thika, 5/10/97, WH, MM

Great Snipe (A# 251): [pres 48A] 10 km N of Busia, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM; [pres 63C] Githumbwini coffee estate, Thika, 5/10/97 WH, MM — two good records for this chunky, uncommon snipe.

Common Greenshank (A# 261): [pres 61B] Rongai, Rift valley, 4/10/97, J&HO

Green Sandpiper (A# 262): [pres 87D] Torosei, on Tz border, 4/10/97, PR, SR, SM — this area holds several seasonal swamps that have rarely been visited by birders but provide some very nice birding

Common Sandpiper (A# 265): [pres 2C] Lokichogio-Kakuma rd, 9 km towards Kakuma, 22/3/98, JM, MJ-D

Terek Sandpiper (A# 264): [pres 88C] a single bird in Amboseli NP, 7/6/98, MM — whilst common on the coast, this species is not often recorded inland: this bird was lost...

Red-necked Phalarope: 1, Lake Nakuru NP, 17/1/98, MM — this beautiful wader is normally pelagic but when recorded inland tends to be reported from the Rift Valley, like this one.

Eurasian Swift: big flocks, Kacheliba, Suam River, Kongelai, 11–12/10/97, BF

Sand Martin: single bird at Kacheliba, Suam River, Kongelai, 11–12/10/97, BF

Common House Martin: many at Lokitela farm, Kitale, 10/10/97, BF;

few with Barn Swallows, Kessup, 6 km E along rd from Iten, 11/10/97, CJ

Tree Pipit: Lokitela Farm, Kitale, 10/10/97, BF

White Wagtail (A# 832): [pres 61C] winter ad. male in garden, 10/12/97, and 2 in factory compound, 4, 14 & 31/1/98, Arroket Tea Estate, Sotik, IF

Whinchat: 1 bird, Lokitela farm, Mt. Elgon, 10/10/97, BF

Pied Wheatear: single bird at Kacheliba, Suam River, 12/10/97, BF — the first record of this species for the season.

Spotted Flycatcher: many seen at Kanyarkwat, c.30 km W of Kapenguria, 12/10/97, BF

Garden Warbler: Madende Bridge, 3 km W Sio river along Mumias-Busia rd, 4/10/97, CJ, PN, OM; Lokitela farm, 10/10/97, BF

Chiffchaff (A# 714): [pres 101B] 1 singing, Ngangao, Taita Hills, 8/2/98, Luc Lens — a more unusual record in that it is away from the central highlands where this uncommon species is normally recorded.

Willow Warblers: not recorded on 5/10/97 but many observed in the morning of 6/10 indicating a significant arrival overnight, Sirikwa Farm, Kapenguria, CJ

Red-backed Shrike: Lokichogio-Kakuma rd, 9 km towards Kakuma, 22/3/98, JM, MJ-D — these birds will have been actively migrating heading for their breeding grounds

Eurasian Golden Oriole: 4 at Kacheliba, Suam River, Kongelai, 12/10/97, BF

Breeding records

Many thanks go to all those who have sent in Nest Record Cards over the past year or so. The response has continued to be good. Over the period covered by this report, up to June 31 1998, a total of 230 records were submitted and accepted by 50 contributors. Of these, 188 were confirmed and 42 probable breeding records and in all cover 126 species. Those people who sent in breeding records are listed below — all those who sent in more than 10 deserve special congratulations, particularly Kuria Ndung'u who was clearly busy observing the breeding birds of Windsor Golf Club!

A new stock of Nest Record Cards (NRCs) has been printed with a more user-friendly, covering a number of options that the last one did not make allowance for. We hope that this will encourage observers in their submission of breeding records. Blank cards are available upon request. Full instructions on completing the card are provided elsewhere in this issue. A small plea — if juveniles are observed being fed by an adult, please note on the second side of the card, the *number* of juvenile birds involved under the column 'Young seen, Out nest'. Thank you!

NRC contributors for the period October 1997–June 1998

Kuria Ndung'u – 26
Andrew Mwangi Waweru – 15
Fleur Ng'weno – 14
Wayne Vos – 12
Peter Karanja – 11
Charles K. Kahihia – 9
James Wainaina – 9
Cecilia Gichuki & Charles Waihenya – 8
Shailesh Patel – 8
Willis Oketch – 8
Dorrie Brass – 6
Michael Maina – 6
Francis Njuguna Kiiru – 5
Jeffory Coburn – 5
Samuel N. Kimani – 5
Kevin Mulai – 4
Zachary Methu Mbuthia – 4

Three and less: Peter Faull, Solomon Mwangi, Dave Richards, Martin Kahindi, Linda and Neil Davidson, Peter Ruoro, Samuel Ndegwa Kabaiku, Titus Imboma, Juma Mohammed, Mercy Njeri, Mary Mwihaki, Bernard Chege, Bernard Musyoka, Alfred Simiyu, Narinder Heyer, North Lake Bird Trackers, Duncan Sivell, Jean Githaiga, Patrick Gichuki, Dominic Kimani.

Records of interest

Common Ostrich: 17 fledged young seen out of nest with 2 adult males and 1 adult female; young about 1/3 size of adults, Tsavo West NP, 11/12/97, DB

Great Cormorant (A# 21): [conf 75B] several feathered young capable of leaving nest when last seen, Windsor Golf and Country Club, Nairobi, 6/1/98,

Cattle Egrets (A# 30): [conf 51C] eggs being incubated, naked and feathered young in and out of nest, actual nests in middle of dam surrounded by water, breeding together with Black-headed Herons and Cattle Egrets in lower branches, Lewa Downs, Timau, Isiolo, 15/2/98, KM

Grey Heron: nests and juveniles of this and other species destroyed when nesting tree was felled, Murungaru town, N. Kinangop, 15/3/98, AMW

Goliath Heron: large juvs in several nests, Lake Baringo, 2/3, DR.

Black-headed Heron (A# 43): [prob 88A] 4 nests with 2 birds nesting, Emali, 22/10/97, WV; 75 nests counted with 58 ads and 38 young of various ages, Hunter's Lodge, Kiboko, 27/2/98, JMo

Yellow-billed Duck: 7 eggs in nest 1/1/98, nest empty 2/1 — eggs taken by boys, L. Ol'Bolossat, Nyahururu, CW & CG

Hadada Ibis: 3 young successfully raised, Murungaru, N Kinangop, 17/2 – 31/3/98, MMw

Augur Buzzard (A# 119): [post prob 49A] 2 young seen flying with parents, 1 young normal morph, other melanistic; parents also showing the two colour morphs, Chepkoilol Campus, Moi University, Eldoret, 11/2/97, BMC

African Fish Eagle: bird sitting on nest at 15:30 h, mate nearby, Amboseli NP, 15/10/97, WV

African Crowned Eagle: feathered young in nest, Hardy Shopping Centre, Karen, Nairobi, 10/11/97, PK —

could this be the same pair that nested near the Giraffe Centre the previous year, or a different one?

Common Kestrel: 3 fledged young begging for food out of nest, Ngong Town, 21/6/98, SP

Scaly Francolin (A# 161): [conf 38D] ad incubating single egg, 2 miles south of Poror and North Leroghi Range, Maralal District, 4/1/98 PF

Common Button Quail (A# 181): [conf 51C] adult seen with 3 young, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 16/6/98, WO — there are relatively few breeding records for this very skulking and secretive species.

Red-knobbed Coot: 5 nests seen, Naivasha, 22/4/98, CK; 4 fledged young being constantly fed by ad, Loldaiga, Nanyuki, 28-30/5/98, DB; many juvs, Makumi's dam, Kinangop, 15/3/98, AMW — this species was once extremely numerous on L Naivasha but numbers have plummeted over the last 5 years. It is therefore good to get some breeding records for it.

Grey Crowned Crane (A# 184): 2 juvs with ad and second nest of 3 eggs being incubated, Makumi's dam, N Kinangop, 15/3/98, AMW; [conf 100D] one pair with chick, nr Tsavo West NP boat landing, Lake Jipe, 25/2/98, FN; 3 recently fledged young, Nairobi NP, NH; 2 young successfully fledged, L. Ol'Bolossat, Nyahururu, 15/1/98 – 5/98, CW, CG — good to hear of several successful breeding attempts for this species which has suffered from loss of breeding habitat.

Two-banded Courser: 1 juv being fed by ad, Observation Hill, Amboseli NP, 18/11/97, FN

Somali Courser (A# 277): [conf 13D] 2 tiny downy chicks sheltering under ad, E of Lodwar-Kalokol rd, off rd to Eliye Springs, Turkana, 12/11/97, FN

Black-headed Plover: ads courting, Nyambene, Meru NP, 12/6/98, WO

African Snipe (A# 250): [conf 62A] 4 eggs in nest, all young successfully hatched and left nest on 19–20/2/98, L. Ol'Bolossat, Nyahururu, CW, CG

Red-fronted Parrot (A# 342): [conf 38D] one very small chick, 2 miles south of Poror and North Leroghi Range, Maralal District, 31/12/97, PF — the first breeding record of this species from the more isolated population in the forests around Maralal.

Hartlaub's Turaco: ad carrying nesting material, Hardy Shopping Centre, Langata, Nbi, 5/5/98, PK

Black Cuckoo: young being fed by Tropical Boubou, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 20/9/97, JW — a species infrequently reported as breeding: boubous are its normal host group.

Klaas's Cuckoo: chick being fed by pair of Variable Sunbirds, 13/8/97 — same observed on 18/8, then an ad. male Klaas's visited the chick briefly, but took no notice, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, JW — Bronze Sunbirds are the more commonly reported host for this species.

Diederik Cuckoo (A# 374): immature being fed by Tawny-flanked Prinia, North Lake Nurseries, Naivasha, 24/5/98, NLT; [conf 62B] juv fed by Grey-capped Warbler, Aberdare NP, 10/6/98, WO — an interesting variety of host species recorded here.

African Scops Owl (A# 382): [conf 51C] single juv seen being fed by ad out of nest, Lewa Downs, Timau, Isiolo, 7/5/98, KM

Spotted Eagle Owl: 2 feathered young in nest, 1 killed by boys, other escaped, fate unknown, North Lake Nurseries Farm, Naivasha, 14–17/12/97, PRu

Verreaux's Eagle Owl: dependent young with adult out of nest, Nyambene, Meru NP, 12/6/98, WO

Malachite Kingfisher: juv being fed, Murungaru, N. Kinangop, 16/3/98, AMW

Abyssinian Scimitarbill (A# 463): [conf 62C] ad with 2 juvs, chasing female Black Cuckoo-shrike, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 26/9/97, JW

African Grey Hornbill: both ads feeding young with insects and figs, Fig Tree Camp, L Bogoria, 31/5/98, SP; fledged young being fed by ad, Kestrel Cliff, Ngong Town, 21/6/98, PLO

Spot-flanked Barbet (A# 484): [conf 88B] 2 fledged young being fed by ad, Umani Springs Camp, Kibwezi Forest, Kibwezi, 5/10/97, KN

Scaly-throated Honeyguide (A# 503): [conf 62C] male Nubian Woodpecker feeding single young, observed again on 3/11/97, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 1/11/97, JW

Nubian Woodpecker: 2 feathered young in nest, Samburu Serena Lodge, Samburu GR, Isiolo, 30/6/97, SMw

Wire-tailed Swallow (A# 552): [prob 89C] pair flying in and out of nest, contents of nest not seen, KWS guest house veranda, Mtito Andei, Tsavo West NP, 23-27/2/98, FN

Lesser Striped Swallow (A# 559): [post conf 63C] ad flying in and out of nest carrying food, Bendor Coffee Estate, Thika, 5/5/97, JG

Rock Martin: ad carrying food to 2 feathered young in nest 5 –12/10/97, fledged young being fed by ad out of nest 18/10, Murungaru, N Kinangop, FNK

Black Saw-wing (A# 564): [conf 62C] 2 half-feathered young in nest, N Kinangop, 18/5/98, CK

Grassland Pipit (A# 814): [post conf 62A] 2 eggs in nest, 1/2/98, L. Ol Bolossat, Nyahururu, 13/2/98, CW, CG

Slender-billed Greenbul: 1 fledged young being fed by ad out of nest, Ngong Racecourse, Nbi, 24/12/97, KN

Spotted Morning Thrush (A# 661): [conf 76C] Von der Decken's Hornbill tried to eat chicks, but could not get to nest due to overhanging thorns, Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 1/4/98, WV

Anteater Chat: 2–3 ads taking turns to feed young in nest with worms as other(s) keep watch, Murungaru, N. Kinangop, 7/6/98, AMW

African Dusky Flycatcher: 2 feathered young seen being fed by ad out of nest, Ngangao Forest, Taita Hills, 11/2/97, TI

Grey Flycatcher: feathered young in nest, Game Ranching Ltd., Athi River, 1/4/98, WV

Buff-bellied Warbler (A# 749): [conf 62C] 2 young being fed by both ads in *Acacia xanthophloea* tree, KWS Training Institute Annex, Naivasha, 30/5/98, CJ

Red-throated Tit (A# 584): [conf 76C] some broken eggs with feathered

young in an old Lesser Striped Swallow's nest, ad also observed carrying food, Game Ranching Ltd., Athi River, 12/3/98, WV — good to learn more about the biology of one of our regional endemics.

Black-throated Wattle-eye: 1 feathered young being fed by ad out of nest, Windsor Golf & Country Club, Nbi, 6/12/98, KN — a species that is not so frequently seen around Nbi.

Long-tailed Fiscal (A# 862): [conf 52C] ad feeding fledged young, Nyambene, Meru NP, 12/6/98, WO

Black-backed Puffback (A# 836): [conf 63C]1 fledged young being fed out of nest, Kimondo, Mukurweini, Nyeri, 21/6/98, PG

Black Cuckoo-shrike (A# 604): [prob 74A] F sitting on nest with M in attendance, Talek River, Masai Mara, 5/3/98, DR

White-naped Raven (A# 578): [conf 74A] ad carrying food to nest, Mara Simba Lodge, Masai Mara, 10-12/3/97, MK

Hildebrandt's Starling (A# 889): nest in use — hole in *Acacia xanthophloea* tree by stream, Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 3/11/97; [prob 88C] nest in use assumed incubating eggs, Amboseli National Park, 15/3/97, WV

Superb Starling: 4 feathered young in nest, being fed by 3 adults, 21/11/97, young capable of leaving nest when last seen 24/11, Tarabete, Kasarani, Naivasha, ZM

Bronze Sunbird (A# 925): [conf 38D] nest with young, 2 miles south of Poror and North Lerogi Range, Maralal District, 28/12/98, PF — this is the first updated atlas record of this species since the Atlas fieldwork ended in 1984!

House Sparrow (A# 992): [conf 62C] ads carrying food to nest, 12/10/97, 2 young being fed out of nest 16/10, Tarabete, Kasarani, Naivasha, ZM

Baglafecht Weaver (A# 960): [conf. 74A] ad carrying food to young in nest, young attacked by bushbaby, Mara Simba Lodge, Masai Mara, Narok, 17-19/3/97, MK

Heuglin's Masked Weaver (A# 955): [prob 36D] c.50 nests with birds building and others displaying, GSU camp, Kanyarkwat, Makutano, 28/1/98, CJ

Speke's Weaver: 2 blue eggs in nest (16–20/2), 2 naked young (1/3), 2 feathered young in nest (14/3), & 2 young being fed out of nest 26/3/98, Murungaru centre, N Kinangop, MMw

Red-headed Weaver: ads seen building nests for 2 weeks 4/97, both seen carrying food 6 & 5/97, building new nest 2/7/97, nest at one time used by Cutthroat Finch, Samburu National Reserve, Isiolo, SMw

Yellow Bishop: 1 naked young and 1 egg (addled?), L Naivasha Country Club, Naivasha, 22/3/98, SK

Long-tailed Widowbird: naked juvenile in nest, Makumi's dam, N Kinangop, 15/3/98; 2 darkish grey eggs with white patches being incubated 4 & 9/3/98, 2 naked young in nest, Murungaru, N Kinangop, 4–9/3/98, AMW

Red-billed Firefinch: feeding 4 chicks, 1 chick bigger than the adults being fed by the male Firefinch, has base of bill white mark like others, but obvi-

ously a parasite, observed also on 6/11, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 3/10/97, JW

Village Indigobird: 1 young one begging food from ad Red-billed Firefinch, South B, Nbi, 20/11/97, SP

Yellow-rumped Seedeater (A# 1058): [conf 76C] 1 feathered chick fell out of nest — and placed back, Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 8/4/98, WV

Abbreviations: GR, Game Reserve; juv — juvenile; imm – immature; L. - Lake; NMK - National Museums of Kenya; Nbi - Nairobi; NP - National Park; NR - National Reserve; Ngulia SL - Ngulia Safari Lodge

Contributors

ALA, Tony Archer; GA, George Amutete; SB, Shelagh Ballard; TB, Tansy Bliss; DB, Dorrie Brass; MB, Mike Bridgeford; LC, L. Campbell; SC, S. Carter; BMC, Bernard Chege; JC, John Clark; CC, Chris Clause; JC, Jeffory Coburn; ND, Neil Davidson et al.; CD, Colin Densham; WE, Wayne Easley; SE, Steve Easley; DF, David Farr; PF, Peter Faull; BF, Brian Finch; IF, Ian Francombe; CG, Cecilia Gichuki; NG, Nathan Gichuki; PG, Patrick Gichuki; DG, David Gitau; JG, Jean Githaiga; WH, Bill Harvey; J&SH, John & Sally Hayes; MH, Maia Hemphill; NH, Narinder Heyer; JH, Jennifer Horne; TI, Titus Imboma; G&DI, Geoffrey & Dorothy Irvine; CJ, Colin Jackson; MJ-D, Marcel Jacot-Descombes; CK, Charles Kahihia; MK, Martin Kahindi; PK, Peter Karanja; FNK, Francis Njuguna Kiiru; SK, Samuel N. Kimani; FK, Fidel Kyalo; TL, Thomas Lehmberg et al.; LL, Luc Lens; SL, Simon Leparsalaach; IL, Imre Loefler; BM, Bernard Mburu; TM, Trelss McGregor; FM, Francis Maina; MM, Mark Mallalieu; I&HM, Ian & Hazel Marshall; CM, Charles Mbito; ZM, Zachary Methu; JM, John Miskell; JMo, Juma Mohammed; KM, Kevin Mulai; RM, Ronald Mulwa; SM, Sikampe Musori; SMw, Solomon Mwangi; PM, Patrick Mwatia; OM, Ogeto Mwebi; MMw, Mary Mwihaki; JMw, Japheth Mwok; NN, Nicodemus Nalianya; KN, Kuria Ndung'u; FN, Fleur Ng'weno; PN, Peter Njoroge; BO, Bell Okelo; WO, Willis Oketch; GO, George Omondi; J&HO, J&H Onslow; PLO, EANHS Pot-luck outing; SP, Shailesh Patel; DR, Dave Richards; PR, Peter Russell; SR, Skyler Russell; PRu, Peter Ruoro; ES, Edwin Selempo; LS, Lester Short; MS, Maurice Sinyereri; JS, John Stott; SS, Sue Sylvester; ST, Simon Thomsett; NLT, North Lake Trackers; DT, Don Turner; WV, Wayne Vos; CW, Charles Waihenya; JW, James Wainaina; AMW, Andrew Mwangi Waweru.

Corrections to records in *Kenya Birds* 6

In *Kenya Birds* 6 (1&2) a number of records were submitted for Githumbwini Dam on an estate near Thika. This lies very close to the corners of four QSD squares. Unfortunately, the wrong square number was given for the site in the last volume. It should in fact be QSD 63C. The corrected records are therefore as follows:

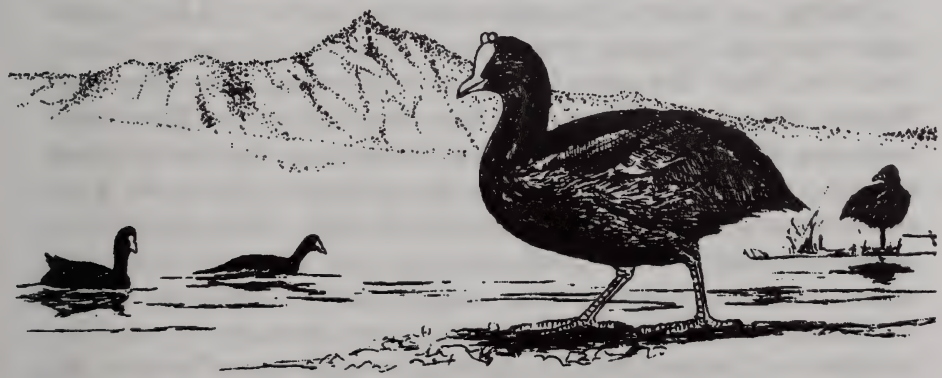
Purple Swamphen (A# 198): [post pres 63C] Githumbwini Dam, Thika: 2 on 2/1/97 and up to 4 in May, MM; 2 at same site 22/6/97, CJ, JL, KD

Common Moorhen: ad with 3 chicks, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 15/6/96, PLO — this was **not** in fact a new breeding record for this square.

Lesser Moorhen (A# 200): [pres 63C] up to 20 present, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 17/5/96; imm birds also seen at same site 7/6/96, MM, and 22/6, CJ, JL, KD; [conf 63C] ad with one chick, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 15/6, PLO

Whiskered Tern (A# 312): [conf 63C] 2 recently fledged juvs at Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 28/6/96, OD

Key to initials: KD, Kristin Davis; OD, Ornithology Department staff; CJ, Colin Jackson; JL, Jeremy Lindsell; MM, Mark Mallalieu; PLO, EANHS Pot Luck Outing.



Red-knobbed Coot

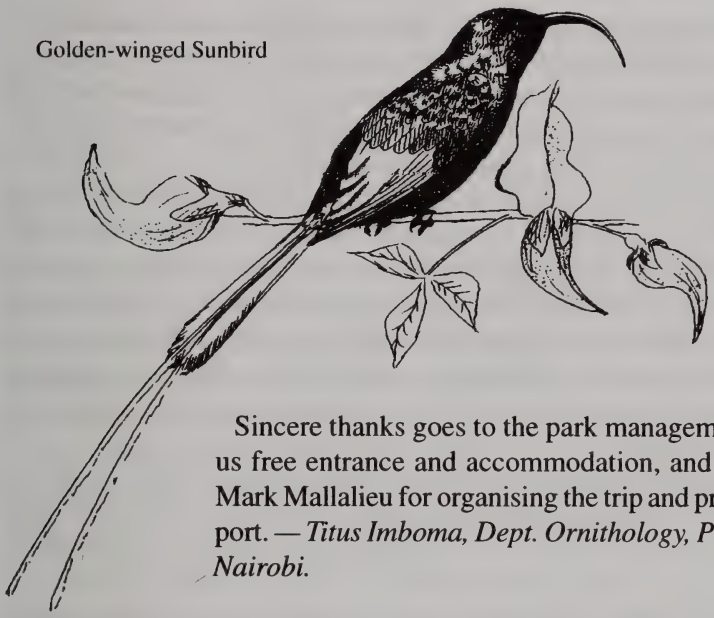
Notes

Nairobi Ringing Group in the Aberdares

From 31 July to 2 August 1998 the Nairobi Ringing Group visited the Aberdares National Park. Our main objective was to track down the elusive Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis*, which has been recorded from the high moorland in the past. In addition to this search, we carried mist-nets for trapping and ringing birds around the Rhino Retreat Lodge where we were based. The participants were the ringing group patron, Mark Malallieu, and NRG members Mercy Njeri, Ogeto Mwebi, Dan Omolo and Titus Imboma. The KWS biodiversity officer of the area, Bernard Ng'oru, accompanied and worked with us.

On the evening of 31 July we set up a total of 72 m of mist-nets ready for early morning bird banding. Before breakfast the next morning, we had already caught a total of 38 birds of 19 species. After breakfast, at about 10:45 h, we drove off to the moorlands in search of the flufftail. We tried luring the bird using tape calls the whole day — but in vain. There was not a single response. Nonetheless, we were able to see the endemic Aberdare Cisticola and the Alpine Chat at close quarters. We also had a wonderful view of the Mountain Buzzard, among other interesting montane birds. In the late afternoon we drove back to the lodge, pitched two more nets, and ringing continued after a late lunch (16:30 h).

Until the last minute of our stay we had seen a total of 64 bird species within the park. Exciting birds ringed included Moustached Green Tinkerbird, Black Saw-wing, Cinnamon Bracken and Brown Woodland Warblers, White-browed Crombec, Golden-winged Sunbird and Thick-billed Seed-eater. We saw a total of five African Snipe among other waterbirds on the high mountain pools and swamps. Rhino Retreat Lodge is one of the most wonderful sites for birding within the Aberdares. The forest behind it holds a lot of highland forest birds, while the water holes and the salt-lick attract a lot of birds in the morning, including Red-fronted Parrots and Olive Pigeons coming down to drink. Among many others, we recorded Rufous-breasted Sparrow Hawk, Red-fronted Parrot, Mountain Greenbul, African Hill Babbler, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Waller's Starling, Abyssinian Crimsonwing, Black-headed Waxbill and Yellow-crowed Canary.


Golden-winged Sunbird

Sincere thanks goes to the park management for giving us free entrance and accommodation, and to our patron Mark Mallalieu for organising the trip and providing transport. — *Titus Imboma, Dept. Ornithology, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

An odd 'raptor'

Raptor people are an arrogant lot. They think raptors are so smart and perfect. After all, raptors soar majestically about in steady smooth flight, not like small flitting things in bushes. They hunt too. They put their flying skills to the test and some of them even chase and kill birds in flight. It is like watching a cheetah full stretch after gazelle.

All other birds give raptors respect, screaming out warnings and diving for cover. So they should. I mean they are lesser things, and well, they should know their humble place. Know what I mean?

I was standing outside my house on the Athi Plains on the 2 January 1998 in the morning when I heard all the small birds let out warning cries. Oh good, I thought, a raptor is somewhere about. Sure enough I spotted a medium-sized raptor at about 2 km distance chasing what must have been a small bird. It zoomed and zig-zagged about and cut off the small bird just feet from the ground. Ah! Such magnificent powers of flight. I marvelled as I always do at the acrobatics of both contestants. My sympathy split between the urge for the raptor to get its hard-won meal, and the urge for the meal to get away. As they approached I could see the small bird weave and dodge. The relentless pursuer tucked in its wings and stooped. The small

bird just escaped. But something was bothering me. The raptor was difficult to identify. Was it a harrier? It looked long-winged but I have seldom seen a harrier so angular and making such a persistent chase. Up, down, left and right, following the small bird, which was probably a female Jackson's Widowbird, for at least three minutes' active pursuit.

The two birds came right at me, then at 50 m they turned and I was gobsmacked. The 'raptor' had a long beak! Yes, of all the most ridiculous things. This definitely was one heck of a weird bird. But surely the flying skills made it a hawk? What? It has a long neck too! Man alive, look, it also has long legs! This simply is impossible. Only raptors fly and hunt this way. Sure I have seen crows of various sorts, and shrikes make rude dashes at small birds, but nothing like this. Well what do you know: it's a heron, a Black-headed Heron.

The flight continued past and the heron endeavoured to catch the bird in its bill. Finally the small bird dived into a tree and the heron continued in its awkward unassuming flight to land further on in the tall grass. There it could go about its business stabbing insects, and the occasional rodent.

There used to be a large roost of Black-headed Herons at the Timau Petrol Station. I was standing in the small grove of exotic pines nearby and was amazed at the amount of casts on the ground. Huge masses of compressed hair, feathers, and rodent and bird skulls. I first thought it was a convention site for eagle-owls. But the petrol pump attendant told me all the herons feeding in the nearby wheat fields roosted there at night.

So the moral of this story is that although raptors are cool... so is the Black-headed Heron! — *Simon Thomsett, P O Box 42818, Nairobi*

Born to be survivors

The Augur Buzzard occurs at very high densities around the Naivasha area. This seems to be because there is an abundant supply of food in the form of mole rats as well as suitable nesting and perching sites. The Augur Buzzard (AB) Project has been gathering information about the factors that influence the ecology and biology of this species in the southern Lake Naivasha area. Fieldwork has finally concluded, and the data are being put together. We thought the following story concerning a pair of Augur Buzzards (ABs) would be of particular interest to readers of *Kenya Birds*.

The pair in question (known as R1) nest in an Acacia tree within the gardens of Joan Root's residence, close to the Moi South Lake Road. R1 reside close to a pair of African Fish Eagles (which have not nested in over ten years). R1 successfully nested in 1995, producing one chick, but since 1996 had been having difficulty in raising chicks. The pair then experienced four consecutive nesting failures (on two occasions, chicks were seen). We were at a loss as to why R1 were having nesting difficulties but suspected predation pressure. Around the middle of August 1997, R1 were seen building a new nest on an Acacia tree and during the first week of October, the female AB was seen incubating in the nest while the male was busy hunting across the road on Kedong Ranch. During the first week of December, two four-week-old chicks were seen calling away frantically for food. The female responded by feeding both the chicks with remains of a previously killed mole rat. When we next visited on 12 December, both chicks were seen healthy and flapping in the nest.

Events then unfolded as follows:

12 December: a pile of freshly plucked juvenile AB feathers were found underneath the fish eagles' feeding perch on an Acacia overlooking the lake. We suspect the chick was attacked in the nest and killed by one of the fish eagles.

18 December: at about 10:00 h, a young AB chick was found on the ground about 25 metres from the nest. The parents were heard calling frantically from a clump of gum trees close to the nest. JR collects the weak and traumatised chick and places it in a dog basket. JR places the dog basket on the roof top of her shed (about 20 metres from the nest tree). At noon, the male AB comes down on the shed and feeds the chick a lizard. That evening, JR accommodates the chick in her house for the night.

19 December: At dawn, JR replaces the dog basket, complete with chick, on the roof of the shed. The chick walks about and saunters to the edge of the roof where it perches on a protruding pole. JR feeds it a dead mouse and later on the parents provide a large rodent (most likely a mole rat). At dusk, the chick responds to the calling parents by attempting to fly, but clumsily lands on the ground with a soft thud. JR finds the chick and houses it again overnight.

20 December: As the day before. Parents seen feeding chick. Chick is flapping away vigorously from roof top. Overnight in the house.

21 December: As the day before. Parents feed the chick a mole rat. The chick appears pretty aggressive and tries to eat the mole rat whole. It fails and has to tear it up into smaller pieces. JR feeds it a mouse in the evening and houses it again for the night.

22 December: The AB chick is now very confident on the roof top and walks to the edge where it perches on a beam of wood jutting beyond the roof. The dog basket is removed as chick no longer needs it.

23–26 December: Parents feed chick regularly on roof top, but chick is able to flap away onto nearby cedar post.

27 December: Chick seen walking about on the ground near pepper trees. JR runs after it, catches it, and returns it on roof top. That evening, chick seen again on the ground.

In the following days, the chick appeared more confident and was calling away quite happily. The parents continued to feed the chick even after it successfully fledged in early January. — *Munir Virani, P O Box 40658, Nairobi and Joan Root, P O Box 86, Naivasha.*

Booted Eagle at Tudor Creek

On 20 February 1998 a Booted Eagle (*Hieraaeteus pennatus*) arrived on the creek. As the bird flew low in front of my verandah I recognised a newcomer and straightaway saw the white 'U' shape on the rump and the white 'lights' between the wings and the body. He (I think of him as 'he' but it could have been a she) swooped down low flexing his tail from side to side and disappeared over the roof, as most of the interesting birds tend to... but miracle of miracles he circled back. Doing a fantastic stoop he descended to the palm tree about 30 yards from my verandah and only slightly below it, giving me an incredibly advantageous view point. It was already nearly dark and he was obviously preparing to roost, doing extensive preening and spreading his tail, wings and every part of his body. I was able to see just

about every last little spot. His breast was all-over brown so he was obviously the rarer dark phase, but once the brown surface was disturbed for preening, the base feathers were a wonderful creamy buff. Only when the feathers were completely smooth did he look dark. The booted legs had extremely long feathers, I would estimate about 8 cm, and they came right down to the yellow feet.

The first day he appeared about 18:35 h and stayed until 09:30 h the next morning, disappearing (after intensive preening) into the larger trees. I was overjoyed when he reappeared in the evening at about dusk and started his preening routine. From then on he appeared most evenings at dusk and left around 07:30 h the following day, until 1 March when he finally disappeared.

Crows on one occasion tried to dislodge him but he completely ignored them. One evening just as he was doing his approach to the roost our resident goshawk had a go at him, but he simply did another circuit and then having shaken the nuisance off alighted on his favourite branch.. He always sat on the same branch in exactly the same position. I can understand why this eagle is easily overlooked: once he had landed he was almost invisible and whilst flying could easily be mistaken for a kite at a casual glance. I think his invisibility once he had settled also extended to the other birds. The drongos never noticed him and except for the one occasion neither did the crows. One afternoon he arrived early and was obviously still a bit peckish. He eyed the smaller birds in the bush below but he never made a kill so maybe it was a case of his eyes being rather too big for his stomach.

On the morning after he had departed, the palm tree was filled with crows and they were behaving rather strangely, sort of preening all the palm leaves with their bills. Maybe he had left some scent they liked or maybe his widely sprayed droppings had attracted extra dudus. He certainly dropped a lot of lovely buff feathers. The crows have never visited the palm again in such a manner.

It was like losing a member of the family once he had gone. My family were pleased not to be tripping over the telescope but I missed his arrival every evening and getting up early each morning to watch him wake up, opening one eye, then the other before tidying himself, shaking himself awake before he departed for the day. Maybe he will follow Booted Eagle patterns and return to his roost next year just as they return to the same nesting sites. I do hope so. — *Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

Nesting Ethiopian Swallows at Lewa Downs

The first time the swallows tried to breed outside my door at Lewa Downs, they were a little bit scared of me. They built a mud nest like a small bowl. I didn't count the days they took building the nest, though for about eight days after finishing moulding it on 27 April 1997 they were taking it in turns to sit on the nest. Probably there were some eggs in it. I could not check the contents because it was a risky climb onto the roof from inside. The roof was made of reeds collected from the swamp.

Unfortunately, my frequent coming in and out of the house I think disturbed the birds, and they stopped sitting. After 5 May I didn't see them again: sad for me because I had already started filling a nest record card.

On 17 June 1998 I returned from Nairobi to find that they had built another nest just opposite the previous one. This new nest was a little bit larger. I was curious to know if they were sitting on eggs or if the nest was empty. The next day I brought a ladder and found three eggs. I was worried that the birds might reject the eggs after I had touched them, but less than two minutes after I came down they were back on the nest and continued incubating. They carried on sitting, until on 29 June I first saw an adult carrying food to the nest and assumed at least one egg had hatched. The chicks started to be noisy, begging for food from their parents, on 3 July.

Initially both parents slept with the chicks, but from 12 July only one adults spent the night there. I think the chicks had grown bigger and the nest was too small to accommodate both parents as well. of them. After the young birds had fledged, they continued coming back to roost on the same nest. However, from 12 August I only saw the parents roosting on the nest at night. The fledged young ones were nowhere to be seen. My guess is that the parents may have chased away the grown-up chicks from there territory as happens with other territorial birds. — *Venice Kevin Mulai, Lewa Birder's Club, c/o Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Private Bag, Isiolo, Kenya.*

Long-tailed Cormorant fishing on reef

On the morning of February 12, 1999, the tide was going out on Bamburi beach. Great Egrets, Little Egrets, Grey Herons, Black-headed Herons, Woolly-necked Storks, Sacred Ibis and various waders were feeding in the tidepools on the old reef near the shore.

Then I noticed a cormorant feeding in the shallow water over the old reef. It was swimming and diving. A little while later a flock of seven Long-tailed Cormorants flew in and perched on the roof of glass-bottomed boat. Soon the swimming cormorant flew up and joined them on the boat.

The cormorants probably came from the Bamburi Quarry pools across the road. I don't think I had seen a Long-tailed Cormorant fishing in the sea before. — *Fleur Ng'weno, P O Box 42271, Nairobi*

A Nairobi breeding record for African Cuckoo Hawk

The Wednesday morning birdwalk visited the University of Nairobi's field station at the end of Loresho Ridge on 17 February 1999, recording, among other things, Jackson's, Red-collared and White-winged Widowbirds and a large flock of Yellow-Crowned Canaries. At about 11:30 h, participants walked up Loresho Ridge road, lined on one side by houses with thickly wooded gardens. Suddenly, a sharp-eyed observed spotted a bird of prey in a jacaranda on the opposite side of the road.

Soon we could all see two birds. An adult African Cuckoo Hawk landed on the telephone wires about 50 metres away. It was dark grey above; the throat and breast were uniform grey, with very broad dark and white barring below that. The tail was broadly barred light and dark. The eye was not as bright as in other cuckoo hawks I have seen. After several minutes, it flew past us into the trees across the road.

The juvenile bird perched in the jacaranda for a while. It was slightly larger than the adult, generally brown above and white below, with a white mark over the eye, a noticeable crest, and round dark spots below. The cere was yellow. Then it flopped around, losing its balance, then righting itself, finally flying off to the jacaranda trees that were leaning over the road above us. — *Fleur Ng'weno, P O Box 42271, Nairobi*

Grey-crested Helmet-shrike at Oloidien, Naivasha

Recently there have been three sightings of helmet-shrikes in the Oloidien area, in much larger numbers than would seem to be usual [see below]. On the evening of 3 August 1998, at around 18:00 h, I saw 17 of these birds in Acacia woodland. The first indication I had that they were there was their unmistakable and noisy chattering. They were moving, presumably foraging,

in one direction, flying from tree to tree in open Acacia woodland. One inquisitive bird flew and alighted directly above my path and, cocking his head, observed me while I observed him! I had an excellent view — striking field characteristics being no eye wattle, and also an interrupted black bar across the breast, which indicates that these were the Grey-crested Helmet-shrikes. — *Sarah Enniskillen, Mundui Estate Ltd., P O Box 1, Naivasha.*

Sightings of helmet-shrikes north-west of Lake Oloidien, Naivasha

In the past we have observed small flocks of what we have always taken to be White-crested Helmet-shrikes (*Prionops plumatus*) around Oloidien, Naivasha. Partly through being unaware of the possible significance of their presence, and also preoccupation with other interests, we have not gone to the point of studying them as closely as they obviously require. This has changed, however, with the sighting by Sarah Enniskillen on their property, Mundui, of an unmistakable Grey-crested Helmet-shrike (*Prionops poliolophus*), in company with others which might have been either species [see above].

We are now putting together a summary of the recent sightings in the hope that this renewed interest will lead to worthwhile findings in connection with the possible presence of the Grey-crested in this area. All the sightings are in the same small area, near Oloidien Lake at approximately 36°25' E, 0°83' S.

2 July 1998: Abdi Anti saw and reported a flock of not less than 12 helmet-shrikes in the sparsely wooded Acacia area north-west of Mundui. He did not have his glasses with him and adds no details.

4 July 1998: Abdi Anti and Molu Ndiba encountered no less than 36 helmet-shrikes in one big flock. This flock was seen on Kinja Farm, slightly further east than Mundui. As with the earlier observation, the birds were seen late in the evening as the observers were returning from work in and around Kongoni Farm. After being watched, again without binoculars and against s setting sun, the flock flew westward to Mundui and were lost in the trees.

31 July 1998: A group of birders encountered these birds again, apparently coming down from the hillside immediately west of where the North Lake Road is met by the track that goes round Oloidien and through Mundui Estate. A first group of 17 flew over southwards into very tall trees immediately east of the road, delayed there only a short while and moved on south-west, disappearing towards Kongoni Farm. These were followed by a pair of birds, and some ten minutes later, another seven were seen flying firmly west towards the new A.I.C. compound, but were not seen again. — *Geoffrey Irvine, P O Box 61, Naivasha.*

[Editors' note: Sightings of this species have continued around Oloidien and we will publish an update in the next Kenya Birds.*]*

Grey-crested Helmet-shrike breeding record

Following the waterbird count on January 10, 1999, Jennifer Oduori's group and mine were driving back through Lake Nakuru National Park on the main park road between Baboon Cliffs and the main entrance. Where the wooded grassland gave way to acacia woodland, we stopped to look at some Coqui Francolins, and noticed a flock of helmet-shrikes low in the trees. They were about the size of grey-backed fiscals, had prominent, tufted grey crests, black and white wings and tails, and made a variety of tinkling sounds. There were about eight of them, moving rapidly through the lower branches.

On February 6 1999, driving back from World Wetland Day in Nakuru with Catherine Ngarachu, we stopped at the lake access opposite the Wildlife Clubs hostel. There the lake had risen close to the road then receded, leaving a mudflat full of waders, crakes, moorhens and coots, and flooded trees full of Long-tailed Cormorants. As we watched the waterbirds, we noticed black and white birds moving gracefully through the low acacia bushes at the water's edge. They were Grey-crested Helmet-shrikes, and this time they were quite near and I observed them more closely. They were about six in number, and several had bright yellow eyes with no eye wattles.

One of the helmet-shrikes, however, had dark eyes, and I assumed it was a juvenile. We noted its short and very straight bit of grey crest, like a 'Mohawk' hairstyle. Another helmet shrike flew into the bush, and the juvenile spread and shook one wing. We watched them for a few more

minutes as they moved on along the lakeshore, the juvenile following two adults, the other three helmet-shrikes moving in the same direction but some distance away. It was only in the evening that I noted in 'Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania' that the Grey-crested Helmet-shrike juvenile was 'undescribed' — *Fleur Ng'weno, P. O. Box 42271, Nairobi*

Hinde's Babblers and Blue Quail near Thika

On 27 December 1998, I found a Hinde's Babbler close to the D416 Kakuzi road, about 11 km north-east of Thika. The bird was calling loudly and persistently from the lower branches of a *Grevillea* tree above sparse *Lantana* bushes between the road and a field of coffee. A search of the area on 2 January 1999 revealed two Hinde's Babblers in a small *Lantana* thicket about 500 m from the previous sighting. The birds were not relocated when I visited the site a week later.

On 9 January 1999, Jeffrey James and I (and my dog) were searching for Red-chested Flufftails *Sarothura rufa* in an area of rough grassland and

Hinde's Babbler

marsh on the Kangema Farmlands estate about 5 km north-west of Thika. JJ flushed a quail from rank grass on the edge of a dense, matted bed of sedges, *Cyperus* sp. The quail flew about 5 m and landed in the dense sedge. We walked towards where the bird had landed and flushed it again. It then flew along the edge of the sedge bed, disappearing beyond some bushes.

We noted that it was a tiny gamebird, roughly the size of a Baillon's Crake, dark chocolate brown in colour, with a whirring flight on rather short, rounded wings (compared with Harlequin Quail *Coturnix delegorguei*). It gave a short '*quip*' call when first flushed. The bird's size, structure and habitat indicate that it was a Blue Quail *Coturnix adansonii*, a species with which I am reasonably familiar from Malawi. The rather uniform plumage indicates that it was a female. This species is now seldom noted in Kenya, but its habitat preferences and behaviour may result in it being under-recorded. — *Mark Mallalieu, P. O. Box 30465, Nairobi*

The Kinangop Plateau

Situated between the Kikuyu Escarpment and the Aberdare mountains is a high (over 2,400 m), flat stretch of grassland — the Kinangop Plateau. For birders the place rings a bell as a hotspot for endangered grassland species such as Sharpe's Longclaw and Jackson's Widowbird. The Kinangop Grasslands form one of Kenya's 60 Important Bird Areas, and are among the most critically threatened of all.

Going deep into early history, the name originates from the Maasai people, meaning 'flooded area'. It was an important meeting point for barter trade between the Maasai and the Kikuyus from the central highlands over the Aberdares (which the Kikuyus knew as Nyandarua).

The plateau was open grassland with fast-flowing rivers and swamps and supported myriads of plains game, including various antelope and zebra, bigger animals venturing out from the Aberdares forests, and of course the grassland birds.

In the early decades of the century the invasion of European settlers turned it into a section of the 'white highlands' and wildlife had to give way to wheat farms, dairy cattle and sheep. To drain the swamps, *Eucalyptus* and wattle trees were planted. Then came independence, the demarcation of land, small-scale farming and the multiplication of the trees as a good source of fuel wood. The current result? Introduced plants and animals have

taken over from the original grasslands and their wildlife. The soils have been poisoned by the exotic trees and the grassland that remains is often over-grazed. A forest on the escarpment which supported indigenous trees, mammals and birds is almost dead, cleared and burned.

Early in 1998 some concerned individuals raised the conservation issue and formed a group by the name 'Friends of Kinangop Plateau'. The group is looking for a way to divert the current trend before the natural plants and animals of the plateau are lost completely. Obviously, going back to the previous grasslands is next to impossible. The only hopeful solution, which is already taking off nicely, is planting of indigenous trees and other plants. These can do well with the small-scale farming providing they don't compete and negatively affect other plants. The end results might be modified versions of indigenous forest and grassland that still maintain the quality of the soil and some of the plateau's biodiversity. They may also help conserve the various dams, over 30 of which have been introduced over the years. These support a wide range of waterfowl and have been the subject of interesting wetland counts.

The group 'Friends of Kinangop Plateau' is composed of individuals concerned for the environment, primary and secondary schools who are members of Wildlife Clubs of Kenya and have been actively involved in conservation, and various community groups who have successfully started tree nurseries of indigenous trees. This note is to request any person or organisation who would help with ideas to come and help us programme the project to suit the community and retain the best habitat, for a better plateau in the future. — *James Wainaina, P O Box 695, Naivasha.*

[Editors' note: For more information on this and other IBA site-support groups, see elsewhere in this issue.]

Bird records from northern Kenya forests

Mt Kulal

Over the months of November and December 1997, we made an expedition to M. Kulal as part of our efforts to study the ecology of forest bird communities in northern Kenya. Mt Kulal forest turned out to be a thrill in terms of both bird-watching and ringing, both of which we did for as many hours as the *el niño* rains allowed us during the 28 days we spent there. The journey

to the place was not easy though. On our way, we had an unexpected chance to watch birds at the foot of Mt Nyiro for four days. We had to stop there to wait for the 'bandit fever' which had gripped the area between Mt Nyiro and Mt Kulal to cool down a little.

The Kurungu area at the base of Mt Nyiro was quite green following the heavy rains. The *Acacia*-dominated woodlands were now tempting birding parks for us. We managed to record about 80 bird species within the four days. Bird watching sessions were kept noisy by the chucking and chuckling notes of Von der Decken's and Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbills, and the sharp repeated calls of the Grey Wren-Warbler. Unexpected sightings over this short period included Pearl-spotted Owlet and Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar. The northern race of the White-headed Mousebird was also often seen. The migrant Black-and-white and Great Spotted Cuckoos were in evidence, and some birds were nesting: we saw White-browed Coucal with two eggs, and a pair of Yellow- spotted Petronia nesting in an *Acacia tortilis* tree hole.

Our first attempt to reach Kulal ended in a day-long car-pushing exercise when we got stuck in mud. However, a day later we arrived at the mountain and then it was action until 18 December. We had 30 bird species in our mist-nets and a total of about 250 individuals ringed. Seventy-seven bird species were recorded in the forest or in the habitats adjoining it above 1,500 m altitude. Among them 16 were probable new listings for the area.

New records for the Bird Atlas of Kenya, square 26B

Dusky Turtle Dove: generally observed calling from the top of very tall trees in forest.

Klaas's Cuckoo: calling in the forest.

Montane Nightjar: frequently heard and seen around the village of Gatab.

Spot-flanked Barbet: observed in the woodland adjoining the forest at about 1,700 m.

Alpine Swift: seen several times flying in groups with other swifts.

Lesser Honeyguide: captured in forest approximately 30 m from the edge. (Also found on Mt Nyiro and Mt Marsabit.)

Nightingale: captured at forest edge.

Sprosser: captured in the same net as the Nightingale, two days later.

Blackcap: commonly seen and caught at the forest edge, sometimes also in forest interior.

Chiffchaff: seen twice in riverine trees in middle of forest.

Northern Puffback: Several observed and heard at Kulal while two females were caught in nets at the edge of a grass glade. (Recorded also in Horr Valley, Mts Nyiro and Marsabit.)

Sharpe's Starling: A group of six seen flying over the forest.

Beautiful Sunbird: One female captured on 14/12/98 in the woodland.

Abyssinian White-eye: A small flock observed outside the forest, at 1,700 m altitude.

Purple Grenadier: Two caught in net at forest edge, and a pair observed building a nest that already contained two eggs.

Stripe-breasted Seedeater: Observed on several occasions in the bushland below Gatab, between 1,500 and 1,700 m.

Leroghi Forest

It took only ten donkeys, a few more workmen, our food ration and the two of us (the determined ornithologists) to obtain some information on the avifauna of Leroghi forest. We did as much as possible within the short time available (18 April to 21 May 1998), camping and working around five stations within the forest. Each of these had its own distinctive features.

Ngurumaut (2,260 m), 19–24 April: a strip of light forest with *Olea africana* and *Juniperus procera* and low bushes of *Rhus natalensis* and *Maytemus senegalensis*.

Sordon (2,450 m), 25 April–1 May: a high, cold and more diverse part of forest interior with open river valleys and glades. *Podocarpus* sp., *Nuxia congesta* and *Cassipourea malosana* are common trees.

Bauwa (1,870 m), 2–8 May: next to the forest edge. The forest part is dominated by *Croton megalocarpus* and *Olea europea* in the lower storey, and *Podocarpus* sp. and *Juniperus procera* above.

Peto (Nangaro) (2,080 m), 9–13 May: among the Karissia hills. This part of the forest is more closed below, dominant tree species being *Podocarpus* sp., *Cassipourea malosana*, *Olea hochstetteri* and *Brucea antidysenterica*.

Ltilia (2,160 m), 14–19 May: forest edge on top of a cliff that faces the Matthews Range and the Ndottos. The forest edge is dominated by *Olea europea*.

Chestnut-throated Apalis

Poro (2,400 m), 20–21 May: two days were spent assessing light *Juniperus* forests between Poro and Maralal.

We were able to record (by observation and calls) about 200 bird species. The 500 or so individual birds mist-netted and ringed comprised 51 species.

At Ngurumaut, large parties of Yellow White-eyes were common, foraging up large trees or low bushes and moving into or out of the forest in the morning or evening. We were welcomed by the trilling and chattering of Chestnut-throated Apalis and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul respectively. Three White-headed Wood-hoopoes were constantly feeding young ones in a tree-hole nest. We spared time to collect data on what was being fed, how often, and by whom.

Along river valleys, there were many nest holes of Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters. Apart from the Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, we observed and ringed Cabanis's and Mountain Greenbul. The Mountain Greenbul was only recorded at the Sordon campsite (one ringed, one observed). It has not been reported in the forest before. Common species in the forest included Abyssinian Ground Thrush, African Hill Babbler, White-starred Robin and Yellow White-eye. Grey Cuckoo Shrike was also common in some parts, mostly seen foraging high on *Podocarpus* trees. Red-fronted Parrots and Olive Pigeons were often seen flying quite high above the trees, usually in the evening, possibly coming back to roost in the main forest after feeding in more distant patches. Indeed, when we visited Poro, in a forest strip along a river valley about 6 km from the main Leroghi forest, we found many Olive Pigeons resting and feeding in the high trees. Cinnamon Bracken and Moun-

tain Yellow Warblers were ringed and observed at Ngurumaut and Sordon river valleys at the edges of open grass glades next to dense forest.

Our site at Bauwa was at the lower edge of the forest and the vegetation here is not really closed. Our camp was next to a marshy stream. At the western edge of the forest is an extensive grassland with scattered *Acacia* trees. We ringed 28 species among the 67 individuals caught and recorded 82 species in the area. They included forest edge and woodland birds, among them African Black Duck, African Harrier Hawk, Tambourine Dove, African Emerald Cuckoo, Moustached Green Tinkerbird, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, African Hill Babbler, Abyssinian Ground Thrush, White-browed Robin Chat, Grey Apalis, Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Violet-backed Starling and Red-headed Weaver.

Ltilia, our last camp, sits on top of a cliff that faces the extensive plains towards Wamba. From the cliff one can see the Matthews Range and the Ndottos to the east. From the plain below the cliff we could hear calls of woodland birds including Slate-coloured Boubou, Boran Cisticola and Rufous Chatterer. Occasionally we could see herds of elephants and buffaloes and at night, the roars of leopards and lions. We concentrated most of our work (bird ringing, observation and censuses) in the forest, starting from the edge. We recorded nine species of raptors soaring over the cliff, namely Verreaux's Eagle, African Harrier Hawk, Black Kite, Augur Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Booted Eagle, Tawny Eagle, African Crowned Eagle and the Bateleur. Little Sparrowhawk was caught in the net as it came to try and seize a trapped Brown Woodland Warbler. Groups of African Black Swifts were also a common sighting over the cliff.

Greater Honeyguides guide

The southern part of the Karissia hills is inhabited by the Ndorobo community. They are traditionally hunters and gatherers, though they have nowadays turned to some cultivation and cattle keeping.

However, the forest is still a very valuable resource for them in terms of honey-harvesting. We witnessed about five cases where our guides (some of whom happened to be Ndorobos) used Greater Honeyguides to locate bee hives in tree holes. The honeyguide would come to our camp and make a vibrating call from the lower branches of a tree. The Ndorobos would respond with a repeated *'grrrr-vroom'* (a tongue vibration followed by a short whistle). The bird would then lead them via repeated perching and

calling to the point where there was honey. If the person failed to identify the hive at the first attempt, the bird would make several other attempts later.

Scaly-throated Honeyguide is also a common species in the forest: we ringed seven individuals during our one-month stay. It never guided honey hunters. We retrapped one ringed Scaly-throated Honeyguide about 5 km away from where we had ringed it two days earlier. We also observed a Lesser Honeyguide at Peto camp.

New records for the Bird Atlas of Kenya, square 38D

African Black Duck
African Harrier Hawk
Little Sparrowhawk
Mountain Buzzard
Verreaux's Eagle
Lanner Falcon: several records.
African Emerald Cuckoo
Verreaux's Eagle-Owl: one individual seen on several occasions in the forest, Peto, 12–13/5/98.
African Wood Owl: heard by night at Ngurumaut.
African Black Swift: seen at Ltilia.
Alpine Swift: seen at Ltilia.
Scaly-throated Honeyguide
Eastern Honeyguide: seen at Peto (2,070 m) on 9/5/98.
Mountain Wagtail: three birds seen feeding from banks of stream at Peto camp and one seen at Poro dam (at lower altitude).
Yellow-whiskered Greenbul: common in the forest.
Mountain Greenbul: one bird ringed and a few others observed at Sordon camp.
White-starred Robin
Abyssinian Ground Thrush: common in the forest.
Mountain Yellow Warbler: common at Sordon.
White-crested Helmet-shrike: seen at Bauwa.
Slate-coloured Boubou: heard at Ltilia.
Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike: several ringed and observed at Bauwa and Peto campsites.

Waller's Starling: common in the forest.
Red-winged Starling: seen at Ltilia.
Sharpe's Starling: common in the forest.

Other interesting species recorded

Booted Eagle: one pale morph observed twice on 15/05/98 over Ltilia Cliff.
African Crowned Eagle: displaying over Ltilia Cliff, and heard several times in forest. At Bauwa we saw a nest attended by a female.
Eastern Nicator: one juvenile was observed near Bauwa camp on 8/5/98. This species is known from the Karissia hills but its status is uncertain. This record suggests that it could be resident.
Black-billed Weaver: three individuals of this striking weaver were ringed and several observed in the southern part of Leroghi forest.
Brown-capped Weaver: we observed several at Leroghi, especially high on *Podocarpus.* trees. Some appeared to be entering active nests.

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Roadside counts show changes in raptor populations around the Naivasha-Elmenteita area

The two most important factors that limit the distribution and abundance of birds (especially raptors) are food availability and nest-site suitability. Population studies of raptors usually involve finding all the pairs of a species in a given area over several years. Up to a point, the value of such studies is increased the longer they are continued and if information on other aspects, such as nest success, is obtained at the same time. However, such studies require a great deal of time (not to mention funding) as well as an obsession with learning more about a particular species. Raptor road counts are, by far, a quicker and more fun way of understanding the distribution of raptors and changes that occur in their populations over time.

Many authors have repeatedly demonstrated the widespread decline in the numbers and diversity of raptors resident in Europe. The causes responsible for this decline were human persecution, the destruction of natural habitat, and the effects of persistent toxic chemicals. All these three factors

are in widespread and often large-scale operation in East Africa (particularly in Kenya). In Kenya, hardly any published studies exist of sufficient scale and length to demonstrate long-term trends in raptor populations. The only long-term study is that of declining population trends shown by the African Fish Eagles at Lake Naivasha. This species is large and charismatic, and shoreline counts made by boat are conducted periodically and are of course fun, since the main objective is to count the eagles.

In contrast, driving from Nairobi to Mombasa is tiring and often tedious (given the conditions of the roads). But if you concentrate on the tops of trees and telephone poles (not just the potholes), you will often be rewarded by the sight of a raptor perched motionless on these structures. Soon, with perhaps a little help and guidance, you will be able to identify and record them. Then driving is fun as well as productive, since you will be helping to collect long term data for changes that are taking place in raptor populations all over the Kenyan countryside. These can in turn be related to changing land-use patterns.

Counting raptors in tropical habitats is difficult: this is even true for relatively open landscapes such as savanna grasslands. In Africa, several observers have been counting raptors while driving through the countryside. However, none of these counts were undertaken on a regular basis and hence comparative studies are usually difficult. Many variables influence the results of each individual count, such as composition of the observing team, daily variation in distribution of the species over their home range and possibly, weather conditions. However, recording the number of kilometres travelled per species seen can give a useful index of densities of raptor populations in an area, if enough counts are carried out.

In April 1996, April 1997 and August 1997, we counted raptors along the road that circumnavigates Lake Naivasha. The average distance travelled was 89 km. The road counts were conducted as part of an overall raptor-banding program around the Lake Naivasha area. Counts began at 09:00 h from Elsamere Conservation Centre and we drove in a clockwise direction around the Moi South Lake Road, joining the Moi North Lake Road, onto the Nakuru-Nairobi highway and finally back on the Moi South Lake Road, returning to Elsamere at about tea-time. The team usually comprised four or five volunteers (including myself) all fairly competent in identifying raptors.

The results for all three counts were averaged and compared with figures for road counts conducted by Christiaan Smeenk in the Elmenteita area, just north of Naivasha. Smeenk conducted these studies regularly between September 1970 and August 1971, covering a transect route of 42 km.

The table outlines the results (expressed as the number of kilometres travelled for each bird seen):

Species	km/bird 1970/71 (Smeenk)	km/bird 1996/97 (Virani)	% increase/decrease
Augur Buzzard	2.5	3.8	Decreased by 52%
Tawny Eagle	18	18.9	Decreased by 5%
Black-shouldered Kite	53	29.7	Increased by 44%
African Fish Eagle	Not seen	45	Not comparable
Long-crested Eagle	47	68	Decreased by 45%
White-backed Vulture	Not recorded	68	Not comparable
Bateleur Eagle	70	89	Decreased by 27%
Common Kestrel	Not seen	89	Not comparable
Wahlberg's Eagle	105	127	Decreased by 21%
Harrier Hawk	Not seen	297	Not comparable
Verreaux's Eagle	Not seen	297	Not comparable
Martial Eagle	168	Not seen	Not comparable
Brown Snake Eagle	140	Not seen	Not comparable
Black-breasted Snake Eagle	56	Not seen	Not comparable

Looking at the figures in Table 1, it is evident that there has been a decline in the number of raptors seen along roadsides since the 1970/71 period. Major declines were shown by common roadside species such as Augur Buzzards, Long-crested Eagles and Bateleur Eagles (all three are considered as resident species). On the other hand, the numbers of Black-shouldered Kites have increased markedly, perhaps as a result of filling vacant spots left by the larger roadside species.

The decrease of the larger roadside species can be attributed to changes in land-uses over time, with a shift from savanna grasslands to small and large scale agricultural plots. This has the effect of reducing the foraging area available to these birds. As a result, the birds are forced to increase their home ranges to sustain their offspring, thus essentially reducing the overall carrying capacity. Also, rapidly changing land-use patterns have the effect of reducing the suitability of nest trees for larger species such as Martial Eagles. Modern agricultural techniques and direct persecution by

humans has reduced populations of snakes and other reptiles which are an important food source for snake eagles. Neither species (Black-breasted or Brown) was seen during the 1996/97 counts.

One can argue that the counts were done by different observers and more importantly, that comparing the Naivasha area with Elmenteita is probably unjustified. However, both the Naivasha and Elmenteita areas are located in the Great Rift Valley, separated by a distance of just 30 km. Climate, soil and vegetation in both areas are more or less identical and hence the absolute population densities of species in both areas are likely to be similar. Thus a comparative study is valid — though the results should still be interpreted with caution. — *Munir Virani, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Thick-billed Cuckoo in the Taita Hills

Early in the morning of 26 March 1998 while undertaking an ornithological survey in the Taita Hills forests, I set out on my routine transect counts, this time in the forest fragment of Fururu. At the beginning of the second transect, my attention was immediately caught by an odd bird banging an insect against a branch about 12 m up in a tree. The bird was odd because it was not among the usual species I had been encountering in the Taita Hills forest fragments the entire eight months I had been working there. The bird was relatively large, had completely white underparts and uniformly grey upperparts with a long tail and from its overall shape and size was clearly a cuckoo. I watched it for about three minutes before it flew off upwards. I followed it to the closest gap in the canopy where I saw it with another of the same species circling together above the forest and calling loudly before flying away.

Description

Species: Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti*

Location: Fururu forest fragment, Taita Hills

Date: 26 March 1998

Habitat: Small (approx. 4 ha.), very disturbed forest fragment. Main tree species are *Phoenix reclinata* and *Tabernamontana stapfiana* while main undergrowth species is *Piper capense*.

Conditions: Cloudy morning, fair light (9:00 am), considerable shading from the upper canopy but colours showing clearly; view was directly from

below and unobscured by twigs.

Optical equipment: Opticron 10 x 50 binoculars.

Previous experience of the species: One observed perched for several minutes in the East Usambara lowland forests. The habitat there was a *Brachystegia* woodland.

General description: A relatively large mostly grey and white bird with a relatively long tail which also appeared barred. It was observed while on a branch about 12 m high in a tree. It was observed mainly from below with extra facial features seen as it occasionally banged an insect against the branch. Its size, shape and behaviour suggested a large cuckoo. Two individuals were later observed circling above the forest with flight pattern and wing shape very falcon-like.

Similar species: There were no other birds around the area at the time of observation.

Confusion species: Usually confused with small falcons which prey on insects as well but the behaviour of banging prey against the branch is very un-falcon-like. The bill was not sharply decurved and hooked like a falcon's.

Details

Body size slightly smaller than e.g. Taita Thrush size but tail relatively long, Upperparts were uniform grey, Wings long, grey with pale edging and tips to the primaries, Underparts were mainly white (throat and belly) with very indistinct streaking on flanks under the wings, the tail was relatively long and appeared barred dark on white; the bill was relatively short (i.e. compared to most other cuckoos) and the lower mandible (observed from below) was clearly yellow; it had an orbital ring which was orange-yellow. The flight of the bird was moderately fast with steady wing beats whilst observed circling above the forest; the call heard in flight was a series of repeated sharp (or harsh) short notes that accelerated towards the end: 'tshi-tshi-tshi-tshi-tshi...'.

Discussion

This bird is relatively rare and is described by Zimmerman *et al.* (*Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania*, 1996) as an uncommon local resident of Kenyan coastal forest and *Brachystegia* woodland from Sokoke along the lower Tana River to Garsen. It has been observed away from the coast in

the East Usambara Mountains of Tanzania (Cordeiro and Githiru, *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* 5: 13–16, 1998) albeit in its preferred habitat, *Brachystegia* woodland. This would be the first record of the bird away from the Kenyan coast and not in or close to *Brachystegia* woodland. However, the Taita Hills forests are only about 160 km from the Kenyan coast, hence not a very unusual extension in the range of a bird known to have seasonal movements (Fry *et al.*, *Birds of Africa* vol. 3, 1988). Furthermore, it is known to inhabit riparian forests which are present along the rivers in the Taita Hills. — *Mwangi Githiru, Ornithology Dept., P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Colonial waterbirds at Naivasha, Elmenteita and Nakuru, January to August 1998

In January 1998 Dr David Harper of Leicester University wrote from Elsamere to Dr Geoffrey Irvine and the late Frank Turner asking for a survey on a weekly basis, if possible, of the Great Cormorant breeding colony at Oloidien, Lake Naivasha. This was suggested as a follow up to a study done by Brooks Childress in 1995 and 1996. Participants were asked particularly to note the proportions of crayfish to fish pellets beneath certain nest areas. Childress's observation was that a larger percentage of crayfish were fed to very young nestlings, changing to fish as the young matured.

The first move was to obtain permission to enter private property, and this was most kindly given by Mrs June Zwagger of Oserian in mid-March. At this time it was found that the colony had adults sitting on eggs and many young.

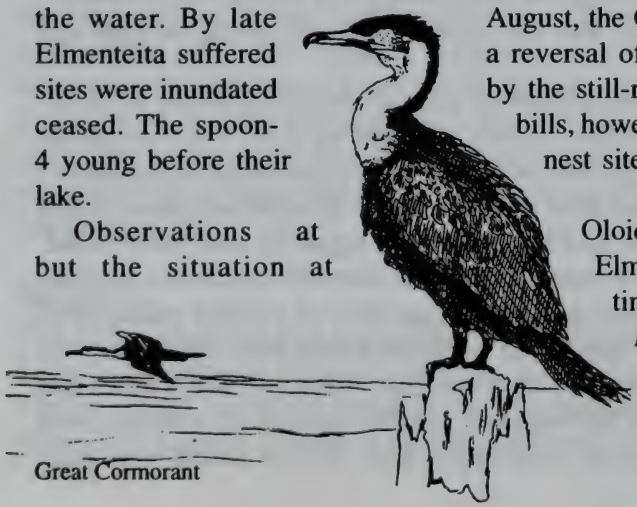
Two sites were chosen at opposite sides of the colony where 12' x 12' areas were cleared under trees heavily occupied by nests. Site one had the most adults sitting on eggs, site two had the most immatures sitting beside adults. A weekly check has been kept of material dropped and pellets found on the cleared areas. As at mid-May only a few eggshells were being found, indicating a slowing up of laying. The results bear out Childress's observations. When nestlings were small large quantities of crayfish pellets were found, and that owing to spaced egg laying these have been replaced by fish pellets, and whole tilapia of 7–10 cm size. On 15 May, gill worm which had evacuated from the dead fish were seen for the first time. Of a marked area of the colony seen from the observation post, 90% of young were fully

fledged and three-quarters of these were the size of their parents. There was vigorous wing-flapping and stretching and an occasional flight out by fully fledged immatures. Also for the first time Great White Pelican were fishing in the vicinity. At the previous visit to the colony, two immature Black-headed Heron alighted on the highest tree and surveyed the area for thirty minutes before flying off. No agonistic behaviour from the occupants was seen.

Ian Marshall joined the observers in early April as he had been investigating increases of fish in the Nakuru Wildlife Forum area, which stretches from the Lake Nakuru catchment to Mt Longonot. Owing to lack of fish, the old cormorant colony at the Njoro river mouth, Lake Nakuru had not been rebuilt and it appeared possible that this population was now at Oloidien. In early May, however, shoals of small fish were seen with their attendant catchers the Great White Pelican, along the west shore of Lake Nakuru from the Njoro River mouth to Baboon Cliffs. At this time, flotillas of fishing pelicans were very small and only eight Great Cormorants were counted along this portion of shore. The pelicans were also to be seen fishing sporadically in Lake Elmenteita, and had started nesting on the rocky islands in the north-west sector. African Spoonbills were also nesting on one of the Elmenteita islands. The levels of both lakes had risen substantially as a result of the heavy El Niño rains.

Dramatic changes occurred soon after this at Nakuru. As fish populations increased, the cormorants re-established an active nesting colony at the Njoro River mouth, but in small *Acacia xanthophloea* trees some distance from the water. By late August, the Great White Pelicans at Elmenteita suffered a reversal of fortunes as their nest sites were inundated by the still-rising lake, and nesting ceased. The spoonbills, however, managed to rear 3–4 young before their nest sites were covered by the lake.

Observations at Oloidien ceased in late July but the situation at Elmenteita and Nakuru continues to be monitored. — *Ian Marshall, Delamere Estate, Private Bag, Naivasha*



Great Cormorant

Threatened birds of Kenya 11: Kulal White-eye

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White-eyes (family Zosteropidae) are a group of mostly tropical species, which, despite their fragile appearance, have proved to possess an amazing ability for crossing hostile habitats and colonising far-flung places. As a result, the vast majority of the about 85 species are distributed on islands.

Although genuine 'islands' are scarce in East Africa, East African White-eyes have been able to find something quite similar. These are small forest fragments, scattered in a 'sea' of arid or sem-arid environments. Such sites are numerous in Kenya and northern Tanzania, and have been rightly called 'forest islands' by several authors. Therefore, it's no surprise that the little yellow birds are found on top of most of the mountains of our region! But here starts the problem: isolated populations tend to diverge from each other, slowly and inexorably, owing to what is called 'genetic drift'. As a consequence, white-eyes in East Africa comprise a large number of forms that differ in their appearance. Depending on one's point of view, these can be treated as separate species or simply as a set of sub-species. The result is a sort of systematic wilderness, where different authors have described as many as seven or as few as three species of *Zosterops* in Kenya and Tanzania.

One of these puzzles is the Kulal White-eye. Some consider it a good species, which should be called *Zosterops kulalensis*. Others prefer to treat it as a race of the Yellow White-eye (in which case, the correct scientific name should be *Zosterops senegalensis kulalensis*). Still others choose to place it in the so-called Montane White-eye, and name it *Zosterops poliogaster kulalensis*. Nobody knows which of these possibilities reflects its real relationships. Indeed nobody knows much about this bird at all, except that it has an incredibly restricted range, on top of Mt Kulal, an extinct volcano east of Lake Turkana. We also know that the very small distribution almost automatically makes it an endangered taxon, because human pressure on the forest of Mt Kulal is increasing.

In November 1997 we reached the small village of Gatab, on the south slopes of Mt Kulal. We aimed carrying out a survey of the avifauna of the area, and especially of its endemic white-eye. This was the start of forty days of very hard work, under the torrential rains caused by El Niño. Around us the ill-famed Chalbi looked much more like a golf course than a lifeless desert... and on top of the mountain we had almost continuous rain and mist and high winds for all of our stay. Nonetheless we obtained some results, and they were quite encouraging. Several white-eyes were mist-netted, and blood samples taken before they were released. DNA will be extracted from the blood and analysed, providing (we hope) a clearer insight into the systematic status of these birds. This will take time, however! Meanwhile we collected a good amount of ecological and behavioural field data. First of all, as we saw, the white-eyes were common, perhaps the commonest species: almost one in four birds captured in the mist nets was a white-eye. They occurred in all habitats from 1500 m upwards and estimates for the total population were in the order of 10,000 individuals... not bad!

Kulal White-eyes were quite varied in their food choice, as they ate fruit, nectar, insects, indeed every food item of appropriate size. We can be sure that they will not starve to death. Perhaps a more interesting discovery is that they were 'commuters'. They seemed to spend the night in the dense vegetation of the forest, but every morning huge flocks were observed at its edges, moving towards the drier habitats around, where they scattered in smaller groups that foraged among twigs. In the evenings they returned to the forest. It is not clear whether these movements occur all year round or perhaps only during the wetter months, when drier habitats become more productive. Still, we can confidently say that the white-eyes, at least for part of the year, are not completely dependent on the very restricted forest habitat.

On the whole, the highest densities of birds were found in the open forest, that is areas with typical forest trees (such as *Juniperus* and *Olea*) but a low and discontinuous canopy. Lower densities were observed in very dense and tall vegetation and in the drier bushlands dominated by *Acacia*. In the forest, white-eyes clearly preferred glades and openings to places with a more continuous canopy. So, they seemed to be mostly an edge species, and this certainly has important consequences from the conservation point of view. Human activity on Kulal seems at present to be causing a slow thinning of the forest. Glades are being opened in dense habitats and edges

are generally increasing. This means that impacts on white-eyes, at least until now, have probably been limited, as their preferred habitat is still available, indeed on the increase. But as time passes, human population, firewood extraction, felling of trees for honey gathering and cattle pasturing are steadily growing, and will certainly cause the death of the forest if no action is taken. How much time is left? We don't know, but from experience elsewhere, probably not much.

What are we to conclude? Well, there is still time for action, but the time will expire soon. The forest of Kulal is of prime importance, not only for its endemic bird, but also for the people living in it, and they are now many. Sustainable exploitation is probably still possible now, if the right measures are put in place... will they be?

In November 1997, Rod Hall from British Airways Assisting Conservation visited Ngulia to work with the bird ringing team. He hatched the idea of two Nairobi Ringing Group members travelling to Europe in the winter — and thus having a first-hand experience of why the birds were migrating south! Just under a year later, after much planning and preparation, Nicodemus Nalianya and Bernard Amakobe finally set off for England. Amakobe reports on their experiences...

Nairobi ringers in England and Portugal

Bernard Amakobe, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

After almost three months of planning, seeking advice, excitement and expectation, shuttling from one office to another and many triumphs and disappointments, we eventually set off on a trip well planned by British Airways Assisting Conservation, the RSPB, A Rocha (Portugal), RSPB, the Ornithology Department and Nature Kenya.

We left Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) promptly as scheduled on 4 October 1998 on board a British Airways plane. Not to dampen our excitement we were shifted from our earlier assigned seats to the luxury of Club World class. Undeniably we were nervous. Anyway, it was not to last a lifetime and eventually we found ourselves at Gatwick Airport. Early morning London and our drama started to unfold. Within two hours we were shuttled by our hosts to Dungeness on the south-east coast of Britain,

our home for the following week. The one thing suddenly obvious to us was the extreme weather difference between Kenya and our host country. Having left Nairobi at 28°C it was now just 7°C — bitingly cold to us but to our hosts a mild autumn day. What a contrast.

The main objective of the tour was to obtain a clearer insight into how bird ringing is conducted in Europe. This could only be done through practical first-hand experience in the nature reserves and ringing stations themselves. We also expected some hints from the reserve managers on how they run their sites and manage information. Apart from ringing we were expecting to assist practically in all types of reserve maintenance duties.

Dungeness

Dungeness is the largest shingle foreland in the world. Shingle is a rare coastal habitat only common in Japan, New Zealand and north-west Europe. It consists mainly of rounded pebbles of flint. About a third of the landscape is vegetated, the rest being exposed to the elements of nature. The shingle itself was formed when chalk weathered in huge amounts during the ice age, and released embedded flint to form the beaches of the English Channel. At Dungeness the shingle is pitted with open pools, some of them disused gravel quarries, others unique natural excavations, probably caused during storms in the past.

Dungeness is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest because it shelters unique plant, insect and bird species. It projects four miles into the English Channel and has a maritime climate. Frequent winds mean a cooler summer and slightly warmer winters than further inland, but less rainfall. Most plants grow poorly in these stressful conditions, but lichens thrive in the clean air of the prevailing south-westerlies.

We spent three days ringing under the keen supervision of David Walker, the ringing warden. Immediately, we were impressed by their ringing station, a comfortable enclosed cabin (our ringing is done in the open!). Their data collection book setting was not different from ours but they took totally different biometrics from us, except for the wing length. Still, we held out own when given a chance to handle the birds.

New to us at Dungeness was the Heligoland trap. This is a bird trap set up in sparse bush or scrub, against which background the meshwire is nearly invisible. The birds are clearly unaware of its presence as they search for food in the bushes around. When birds are to be caught, they are driven

from the bushes inside the trap to a central point, where there is a glass enclosure. The trapper unsnaps a swinging door that encloses the birds in the glass box, which has outlets only accessible to the trapper himself. When no ringing is going on, the trap is de-activated to ensure birds move freely. We were really amazed by how well the trap worked. It is a widely used method, as we found this kind of trap in all the other ringing stations, even in Portugal.

We managed to ring birds such as Blackbird, Blackcap, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Greenfinch, Hedge Sparrow, the very distinctive Ring Ouzel, Robin, Sedge Warbler, Siskin, Sparrowhawk, Starling, Willow Warbler and Wren, just to name a few.

Another construction that impressed us was the bird hides. This made it amazingly simple to watch a very diverse variety of ducks and waders without distracting their attention or scaring them into flight. We were also introduced to seashore bird watching and counting. As Dungeness is right on the English Channel, bird hides are build on the shoreline. Many of the sea birds are attracted by waste water from a nuclear power plant on the reserve. The recycled water contains fish and other food materials trapped in the process, providing easy food for many birds such as Herring Gulls, cormorants, gannets and Kittiwakes, which are easy to spot from the hides.

We took part in all sorts of maintenance tasks on the reserve, including cutting down trees. Do not get alarmed! Generally we believe that trees always have a positive side, but these were to go as they were used as breeding grounds by Magpies and Carrion Crows and a vantage point for Kestrels, which go ahead and prey on other birds and their eggs. They in particular destroy nesting sites of the Lapwings and Redshanks, which are being persecuted in many ways. We also had demonstrations of mink trapping (and actually saw one trapped). These small, introduced mammals are also very destructive. They will eat anything in the vicinity and thus have to be got rid of. The traps are set on the shore of the small open pits at strategic places, always hidden in vegetation. The minks walk in readily as they are very inquisitive animals. They are shot as soon as they are discovered as it is inhumane to leave them to starve to death.

Around 800 pairs of Black-headed Gulls and 250 pairs of Sandwich Terns can be seen at Dungeness. By creating pools and lakes on the reserve, the RSPB has provided suitable habitat for wintering wildfowl. Over 50 species of birds now nest on the reserve, many using the wetland areas. All

this is due to a concerted management effort by the RSPB. The reserve managers also take great care in the way they deal with visitors and RSPB members.

Radipole and Arne

After a very successful first week we now took a train bound for Weymouth, in the south-west of England. From the station we were taken straight to a small shoreline town called Portland, to stay at the bird observatory. Unfortunately the weather was so windy and severe that no meaningful ringing or bird watching could be done. We still enjoyed the beauty of the magnificent shoreline along the English Channel, complete with cliffs and hills in the background. The observatory is housed in a former light house that is about 400 years old, which in itself was exhilarating.

After three nights we moved to Radipole Lake, a unique reserve right in the centre of Weymouth. The key habitat is reed-beds, a very important breeding and roosting ground for species such as the Bittern, Bearded Tit, Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Reed Bunting. Radipole covers 190 acres although roads, railway and urban development have encroached on it. The reserve contains four main habitats: open water, scrub, reed beds and salt marsh. The reeds are managed mainly to attract the Bitterns to roost and breed: these birds are now endangered in Britain due to habitat loss. The management are also anxious to increase the numbers of other reed-bed species. The fields surrounding the reserve are also soon to be converted to reed-bed habitat as this is

The warden, Martin Slater, told us about their future plans for the lakes and reed beds, and how they managed their information on computer. It was interesting that management decisions were based directly from the data obtained from the field. This meant that data facilitated appropriate action and sensible allocation of funds. As at Dungeness and the other 150 plus RSPB reserves, five-year plans were prepared and reviewed regularly, which ensured there was no misapplication of funds.

We could not do any ringing but bird-watching in and around the reserve more than compensated for this. We spotted Cetti's Warbler and a superb male Reed Bunting (though not, in the end, the Bearded Tit). Also an odd-looking dog on the grassy fields of the reserve — which turns out to be more British wildlife, a fox!

Arne Nature Reserve

Our kind warden decided that without visiting Arne we will not have seen the best of Dorsetshire and we set off for a day tour to this heathland. Arne is a 500 ha nature reserve including 300 ha of lowland heath and extensive salt marshes that lead to the mud flats of Poole harbour.

The RSPB has had a nature reserve here since 1965. The reserve is mainly open heathland, a type of habitat that is rapidly disappearing in Dorset. By careful management of the land, the RSPB is trying to safeguard the typical species of heathland. For instance, this is one of the few remaining areas in Britain where the rare Dartford Warbler occurs. All six British reptiles are present, which include the very rare smooth snake and sand lizard.

Heathland conservation is unusual. The main concerns are elimination and prevention of encroachment by alien species. One of the most dangerous colonists is the pine, which kills everything under its base when well established. It forms a very thick layer of cones and shed leaves that do not allow heath to grow. The other woody species causing real havoc is rhododendron, which spreads steadily and successfully. It eventually forms a dense tangle of branches and completely destroys the native flora. Without proper management, scrub and bracken would invade heathland and easily overwhelm it. It is preserved using both traditional and modern approaches, through scrub clearance, re-introduction of grazing, and controlled burning.

After fantastic views of Poole Harbour, Curlews, Brent Geese, Shelducks, Oystercatchers and Black-headed and Common Gulls, we eventually caught up with the rare Dartford Warbler — a real feast for the eyes. As we were preparing to depart, the Warden persuaded us to glance at the feeding table in the carpark. We were amazed to see Wryneck, Long-tailed Tit and Nuthatch at very close range, along with Great Tit, Chafffinch and Blackbird. We eventually left exhausted but extremely happy.

The next day we braved the trains and the underground all by ourselves on our way to The Lodge, Sandy, HQ of the RSPB. Over the next two days we had a taste of the RSPB's astonishing range of activities. With over 1 million members this is a formidable conservation organisation. We also are lucky enough to visit the British Trust for Ornithology, the centre from which all UK bird ringing is co-ordinated. Rules are very strict in the UK, with thorough and vigorous training. We were impressed by the files and files of ringing data accumulated over years, which they plan to computerise for easier storage and retrieval.

To forestall future regrets, we also paid a visit the Natural History Museum's bird section in Tring. The collection Manager asked us how large the Nairobi collection was and we proudly announced that we had about 23,000 skins. We were totally stunned to hear that their skin collection alone contained over 1 million specimens, not to mention the skeletons and specimens stored in alcohol. In the skin collection we saw some skins prepared by Charles Darwin himself, and also had a chance to peep at extinct species which are kept under lock and key.

At this point we realised we had only two hours to board a train and head for Heathrow, from where we would fly to Portugal the next morning.

A Rocha Centre, Portugal

Lisbon was basking in warm sunshine, allowing us to discard our heavy jackets and jumpers. But here was another major barrier, as we could no longer communicate with anyone in English. Someone was to meet us at the airport, but after two hours no one had appeared. We decided to take charge of our own fate. We knew our final destination was about four hours away and it was already three in the afternoon. With maps from the airport tourism office we plotted the best way to reach A Rocha, managing at last to board a coach from Central Lisbon. Our destination was Portimão in south-west Portugal, in the Algarve province. We knew this was not our final destination but it had a certain link to the address of A Rocha. We reached Portimão at 7.00 pm and this is when the real saga began. Nobody understood a word of English and to make matters worse, A Rocha seemed to be in quite a remote and inaccessible part of the region. In short, we were totally stranded. After enquiring from several taxi drivers and getting no constructive help, we started to panic. We tried to telephone A Rocha Centre to no avail. But, wait a minute; there was this taxi driver who understood English a little better. He informed us that he could not take us to an address he himself did not know. He asked us if we had the phone number of our would-be hosts, and we half-heartedly gave it to him knowing nothing would come of it.

An idea struck him and he asked us which number we had used. And so it turned out that we had been including the code, and the stupid machine could not comprehend what we were getting at. When we excluded the code number, it was like manna from heaven to hear the machine croak into life. So much so that I nearly replaced the receiver in a moment of joy, only

for Nicodemus to intervene. Anyway, we gave our host our location and within half an hour we were again being welcomed with suitable pomp and ceremony.

The next morning we had a tour of Quinta da Rocha, on the estuaries, marshes and pine woods locally called the bluffs. Eleven lifers clocked up — Bluethroat, Water Pipit, Redshank, Fan-tailed Warbler, Water Rail, Azure-winged Magpie, Spanish Sparrow, Black Redstart, Crested Lark, Garden Warbler, Little Owl and Peregrine.

The weather was perfect and we were able to ring for four good days, catching some species which many other trainees in Europe would envy us handling. The resident warden, Mark Bolton, opted to scribe and supervise our ringing, identification and general bird handling techniques. We were able to learn important ageing techniques based on minute details — the primary and secondary coverts, and the tail moult pattern. It was a real challenge. We also polished our skills on fat and muscle scoring tactics. Some of the interesting species ringed were Spotted Flycatcher, Reed Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Common and Black Redstarts.

We really had to tear ourselves away from Quinta da Rocha. However, the expedition was over and we were bound for home, liking it or not. Back from Lisbon to London, where Paul Buckley from the RSPB had kindly offered to take us around for the day to see the sights. No birds this time but buildings — and a glimpse of the Queen herself entering Buckingham Palace!

The trip was a great success in terms of learning about ringing and reserve management. But it also broadened our personal horizons. We met and made friends with many people of diverse cultures and ages. Our hosts and the many other people we met were very friendly, enthusiastic and easy to talk to. From their accounts of different life experiences, we got an impetus to appreciate who we are and always work hard to improve our social, spiritual and economic well being. We hope to make constructive use of what we have gained.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to BAAC, RSPB and A Rocha for sponsoring our visit, and to the many people in England, Portugal and Kenya who extended hospitality and help.

How to complete the new Nest Record Card

Colin Jackson
P O Box 383, Watamu

Five years ago, the Nest Record Card of the EANHS Nest Record Scheme changed face quite considerably. The original 'open-plan' look gave way to the current 'boxed' style with a series of options to choose from for each category of breeding record. Within each category, a selection of options was listed, each one with a number assigned to it to allow for easy input into a computerised database. The first update in 1994 was found to have a series of problems making the Card difficult to use. Most of these were addressed and the Card improved with the second version in 1996. From this second edition we again had a lot of useful feedback from contributors to the scheme. When the stock ran out last year we refined the design of the Card yet again and now have the third (and perhaps final!) edition. This latest edition is blue and slightly smaller (thus fitting into your field notebook more easily!), but it has other, more important, new features that are summarised below, along with more detailed instructions on how to complete a Card. The idea is to help *Kenya Birds* readers have a better understanding of how the Cards are used and thus be able to contribute more effectively to the Nest Record Scheme — we look forward to receiving many more over the next months!

Summary of new format

The basic format is the same as the first re-vamped edition with the various major categories of any breeding record divided into boxes. These have been ordered in a logical sequence for easier completion, starting on the first side of the Card with more general information on the observation followed on the second side by the finer details. Sometimes observations of the breeding attempt may be too numerous for the space available to write them. A separate card (providing a third side to complete) was produced for such cases This extra card has boxes for the basic general information that links it with the accompanying first Card (i.e. observer name and species). It then provides space for any further notes or drawings that the observer

may want to add. Please note that *the more detailed* an observation is, *the more use* it is for later analysis and reference.

Detail of categories for new format

The numbers on the annotated example of the three sides of the Card correspond with those of the sections below. If you contribute to the scheme, please read the instructions here carefully as some points may not be so obvious.

Some of the 'boxes' on the Card **must** be completed if the record is to be of any use (for example, a Card that didn't list the species concerned would not be of much value). Others provide information that is useful, but not essential. Each section below is marked accordingly as either '**always complete**' or '**useful but not essential**'.

1.OBSERVER **[always complete]**

Name: The full name of the observer reporting the record.

Address: The observer's postal address by which s/he can be contacted; telephone and / or email address are also useful.

Observer no.: This is a number that may be assigned to you by the Nest Record Scheme Co-ordinator if you are a regular contributor. It would be linked to your name on the computer and used to speed up data inputting to the computerised database. Please do not fill this in unless you have received a letter with a number from the co-ordinator — as yet very few have been issued, but it is hoped that more will be in the near future.

2.SPECIES **[always complete]**

Species (Common/Scientific name): In the space provided, write **either** the full common (English) name of the bird observed breeding or the full binomial scientific name. (You can write both if you wish, and can fit them into the space, but it is not necessary.) IMPORTANT NOTE: You should use the names from either the *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya*, 3rd ed, EANHS, 1996, or from *The Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania*, by Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson, 1996. The names used on the Department of Ornithology's BirdMap Checklist are taken from the EANHS Checklist and are therefore also fine to use. DO NOT use the names from the Collins *Illustrated Checklist to the birds of East Africa* by Ber van Perlo as many of these are confusing.

Checklist no.: This is the number beside the species name in the *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya*, 3rd ed, EANHS, 1996. It is also the same number as given on the Department of Ornithology's BirdMap Checklist. However, if you do not have access to the number, then do not worry — it can be filled in at a later stage in the Society's Office.

> **NOTE**: The *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya*, 3rd ed, EANHS, 1996, available at the Nature Kenya (EANHS) office for a mere Ksh 100, is an extremely useful booklet to have and is highly recommended for anyone who as yet does not have their own.

Date of first observation: Write the date (day/month/year, e.g. 05/10/98 for 5 October 1998) that the breeding event was first noted.

3a. LOCALITY — NAME **[always complete]**

Name: The name of the actual site that the breeding event was observed. This could be an area of a National Park, the name of a farm, school or hotel, a sub-location, a suburb of a town, etc. The name should give as much detail about the exact location as possible. Examples might be: 'Mzima Springs, Tsavo West National Park', or 'Kimuri High School compound, North Kinangop' or 'Ngong Racecourse, Nairobi'.

Nearest town: The name of the nearest village or town that is relatively well-known and *that can be found on a good map*. If you put the name of a local centre / village, please also put either the next nearest, larger centre that is most likely to be known by more than just the local population, or the area in which it is found, e.g. Fururu, Taita Hills ('Fururu' alone will mean nothing to anyone who has not visited that actual site).

Other details: Any other details that will aid in the detailed locating of the breeding record. This may be another name of a town or area that will add to the above, or it may be, for example, a description of how far along a certain path from a given point that the record was made. **The more information you can give, the more precisely the record can be located.**

Country: Draw a small circle around the number in front of the country in which the observation was made. e.g. **01** Kenya

3b. LOCALITY — LAT/LONG & ALTITUDE **[useful but not essential]**

Lat & Long: These six small boxes are to enter the grid reference for the breeding record IF IT IS KNOWN (e.g. if you have access to detailed maps or a Geographic Positioning System). If you do not know it, then do not attempt to complete it but simply send in the Card anyway and it will be completed in the EANHS at a later stage — so long as enough detail is given in section 3a.

Altitude: Again, only complete this IF IT IS ACCURATELY KNOWN. If you do not know it, then do not complete it. If the altitude is known in feet, then write it as such making very clear that it is in feet and not metres.

Atlas square: This is the Quarter of a Square Degree (QSD) square used by the *Bird Atlas of Kenya* Lewis and Pomeroy, 1989, that the location where the breeding record was made falls in. This is explained in full on the sheet supplement supplied with *Kenya Birds* vol. 7, which also has a map of Kenya showing all the QSDs for the full country. Copies are available upon request from the Department of Ornithology, NMK. Again the same applies — IF THE ATLAS SQUARE IS NOT PRECISELY KNOWN, then do not complete this section. It will be filled in at a later stage in the EANHS office.

4. SEASON **[useful but not essential]**

Dry / Wet / Unseasonal: Circle the number beside the sub-category or choice that best fits the season when the record was made. This is somewhat subjective, but make the best attempt at it. Therefore, for example, if the rains are just beginning, one would circle '**04**' indicating 'Early wet season'. If rain is occurring out of its normal pattern, e.g. the El Niño rains, then '**07**' would be most appropriate with 'El Niño' written in the space titled 'Details:'.

5. STAGES OF BREEDING **[always complete]**

01–06: Circle whichever of the six categories were observed for the breeding record. For many single-sighting records, there will only be one stage observed e.g. an adult feeding young away from nest would be category 06. However, a breeding attempt that is followed over a number of days or weeks will cover several stages, all of which should be marked on the card.

1. Observer

2. Species

OBSERVER

NAME: CATHERINE KAMAU Observer No.

ADDRESS: P.O Box 40658 Nairobi

SPECIES (Common/Scientific name): BRONZE SUNBIRD Nectarinia kilimensis

Checklist No. 1179

Date of first observation: 17 / 10 / 1998

3a. Locality - name

3b. Locality - Lat/Long & altitude

LOCALITY

Name LAKE OL BOLOSSAT

Nearest town OL JORO OROK, NYAHURURU

Other details 5KM SOUTH OF OL JORO ORDK, OFF THE NYAHURURU ESCARPMENT RD, SOUTH OF NYAHURURU

COUNTRY: (01) Kenya 02 Tanzania 03 Uganda 04 Other

Lat: 0 ° 09 ' 10 " (S)/S

Long: 36 ° 26 ' 05 " E

Altitude: 2400 m

Atlas Square: 62A

4. Season

SEASON (circle where appropriate):

Dry: 01 Early 02 Mid 03 Late

Wet: 04 Early (05) Mid 06 Late

Unseasonal: 07 Rain 08 Drought

Details:

09 Undescribed

5. Stages of breeding observed

STAGES OF BREEDING OBSERVED (circle where appropriate):

01 Courting (02) Nest building / carrying nest material

(03) Nest with contents sighted 04 Dependent young out of nest

05 Nest with contents not seen: adult incubating / brooding

06 Nest not seen: adult feeding young / carrying food

6. Colony / Brood parasite

COLONY / BROOD PARASITE: 01 Colony with stages as indicated

(02) Nest parasitised (complete seperate cards for host AND parasite)

7. Habitat

HABITAT (circle one or a combination where appropriate):

1. Forest 2. Woodland 3. Wooded grassland 4. Thicket (5) Bushland / scrubland / shrubland

6. Grassland 7. Barrenland: (7.1 Rocks / cliff 7.2 Sand / mud / salt flats 7.3 Semi-desert 7.4 Desert)

8. Wetland: (8.1 Swamp / marsh 8.2 Floodplain 8.3 River 8.4 Pond 8.5 Lake 8.6 Estuary 8.7 Marine)

9. Human sites: (9.1 Urban / industrial 9.2 Suburban / garden (9.3) Farmland / cultivation 9.4 Plantation)

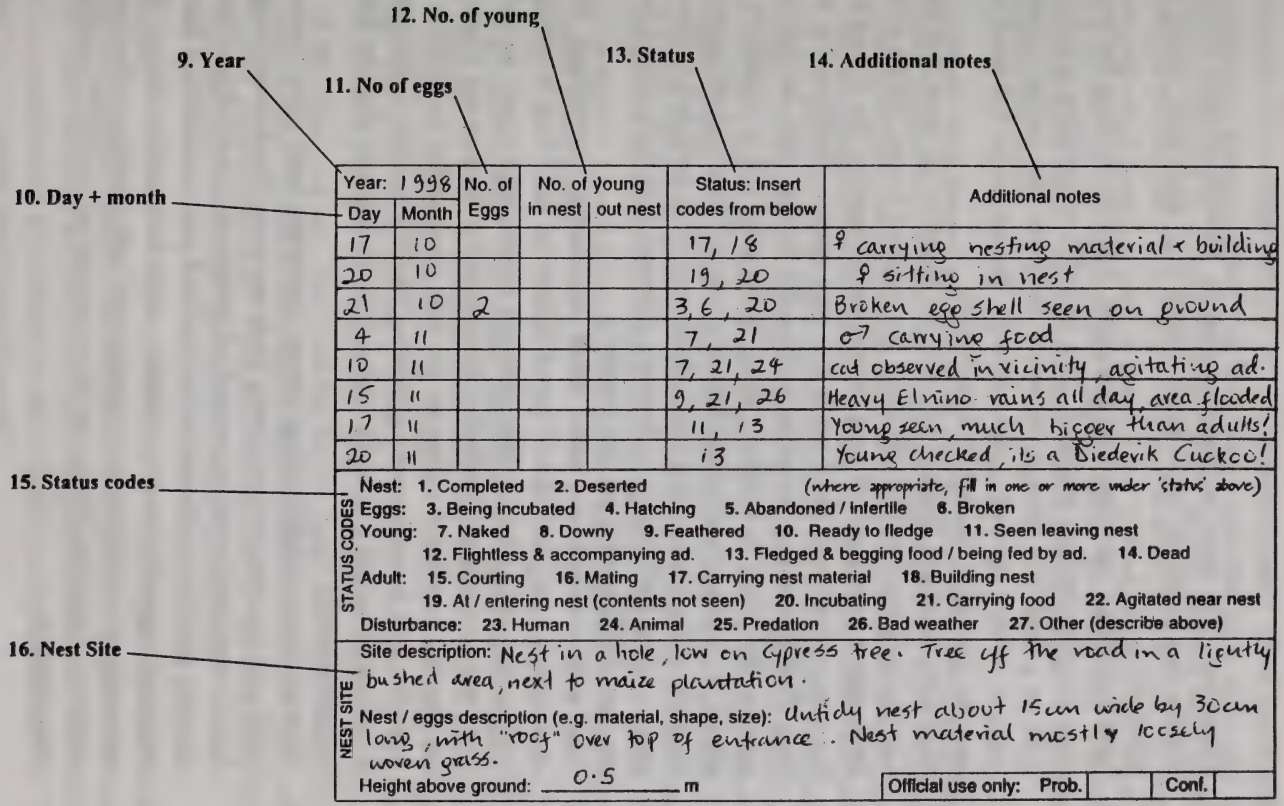
10. Other (specify)

Dominant plant(s) in habitat (list one or two) CYPRESS TREES and MAIZE PLANTATION

8. Please return to...

Please return completed Nest Record Card to:

The EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser, PO Box 44486, Nairobi. Note: Please complete both sides!



Year: 1998		No. of	No. of young		Status: Insert	Additional notes
Day	Month	Eggs	in nest	out nest	codes from below	
17	10				17, 18	♀ carrying nesting material + building
20	10				19, 20	♀ sitting in nest
21	10	2			3, 6, 20	Broken egg shell seen on ground
4	11				7, 21	♂ carrying food
10	11				7, 21, 24	cat observed in vicinity, agitating ad.
15	11				9, 21, 26	Heavy El Niño rains all day, area flooded
17	11				11, 13	Young seen, much bigger than adults!
20	11				13	Young checked, it's a Diederik Cuckoo!

STATUS CODES

Nest: 1. Completed 2. Deserted (where appropriate, fill in one or more under 'status' above)
Eggs: 3. Being incubated 4. Hatching 5. Abandoned / infertile 6. Broken
Young: 7. Naked 8. Downy 9. Feathered 10. Ready to fledge 11. Seen leaving nest
12. Flightless & accompanying ad. 13. Fledged & begging food / being fed by ad. 14. Dead
Adult: 15. Courting 16. Mating 17. Carrying nest material 18. Building nest
19. At / entering nest (contents not seen) 20. Incubating 21. Carrying food 22. Agitated near nest
Disturbance: 23. Human 24. Animal 25. Predation 26. Bad weather 27. Other (describe above)

NEST SITE

Site description: Nest in a hole, low on Cypress tree. Tree off the road in a lightly bushed area, next to maize plantation.

Nest / eggs description (e.g. material, shape, size): Untidy nest about 15cm wide by 30cm long, with "roof" over top of entrance. Nest material mostly loosely woven grass.

Height above ground: 0·5 m

Official use only: Prob. Conf.

01. **Courting**. This must be *breeding* display. Beware of other forms of display that might be taken for breeding (e.g. territorial, young with adult, etc.).
02. **Nest building / carrying nest material**. Adult(s) building the nest or seen carrying nesting material. This includes excavating a hole in a bank or a dead tree (though be aware that birds like barbets excavate holes to roost in as well as for nesting). The nest does not need to be seen for this stage, though it is preferable.
03. **Nest with contents sighted**. For this, the observer has been able to see *into* the nest itself and has checked the contents (eggs, chicks etc).
04. **Dependent young out of nest**. In *nidifugous* species, the young leave the nest immediately they hatch and may remain flightless for some time. Flightless young out of the nest qualify for this stage. In *nidicolous* species, the chick is helpless, stays in the nest and is tended by the adults. A clearly juvenile bird outside of the nest but with wing and tail feathers still growing, and with adults nearby, is included in this category. A lone bird simply in juvenile plumage with fully grown feathers does NOT qualify for this category.
05. **Nest with contents not seen: adult incubating / brooding**. When observing a nest, one should never disturb an adult that is sitting on eggs or brooding chicks. This category covers such cases, as well as nests that are too inaccessible for the contents to be seen but where one can see that an adult is sitting on the nest, presumably incubating. Beware that you do not mistake a roosting bird for one that is incubating. It is best to watch a nest for some time to confirm that the bird *is* actually nesting.
06. **Nest not seen: adult feeding young / carrying food**. Here the nest is NOT seen but one or more young birds are *actually observed* begging food from or being fed by an adult. Alternatively, an adult is observed carrying food (try to observe where the bird goes to make sure that it is not a male courtship-feeding a female, rather than feeding chicks). Note: some migratory species (e.g. certain terns) will continue to feed young whilst on migration. These are an exception and do NOT qualify for this category.

6. COLONY / BROOD PARASITE **[complete only when applicable]**

A *colony* is a group of birds that have built nests near each other and are therefore breeding in close proximity. Many weaver species are colonial nesters as are herons, cormorants, swifts, and some species of bee-eater, among others. A *brood parasite* is a species of bird which does not build its own nest but lays its eggs in the nests of other 'host' species. The best known brood parasites are the cuckoos, but honeyguides and indigobirds also parasitise nests.

01. **Colony with stages as indicated**. If you observe a breeding colony then it would be a lot of work to fill out a separate NRC for every nest! Therefore just complete ONE card but indicate on it the different stages that are observed in the colony, writing on the reverse side (side two) of the card the approximate proportions of the colony that is at each stage. For example, if approximately 30% of the pairs were courting, 40% nest building, 20% incubating and 10% feeding young, then under section **5 'Stages of breeding observed'** circle all of the appropriate sub-categories and then WRITE IN the proportions of each stage observed on the reverse side of the card under 'Additional notes' 13 (see below). Don't forget to indicate how many pairs/nests are present in the colony too!

02. **Nest parasitised**. The most commonly recorded observation of a 'parasitised nest' is when an adult bird, the 'host', is seen feeding the young of a different species, the 'parasite'. For this — or indeed if you are fortunate enough to see a 'parasite' female enter the nest of a host — then complete TWO cards, one with the parasite's name in section **2 'Species'** and the other with the host's name. On *both* cards circle this category in this section and complete the reverse side of the card. Under 'Additional notes' write the host species for the parasite's card and the parasite species for the host's card (see below).

7. HABITAT **[always complete]**

Under this section, simply circle the habitat that best fits the habitat the nest was in. Some habitats may not fit any one category on the card. If so, either circle a combination of habitats or add a brief description under no. 10 'Other' (e.g. 'coastal sand dunes & scrub').

Dominant plant(s) in habitat — this is useful but need **only** be filled in if you know the plant species well. Most people are not botanists, and if you don't know the dominant plant, don't worry about it.

SIDE TWO

8–13 HISTORY OF BREEDING STATUS **[always complete]**

This table allows the observer to record the progression or 'story' of a breeding attempt over a period of time. Ideally this would be the whole breeding event from courtship to fledging, but any set of observations over time is useful. Each of the eight rows in the table represents a separate day when the breeding attempt was observed. Details for that day should be filled in for each column accordingly (see detailed explanation below). Clearly, if the nest is checked often, the status may not change much from visit to visit. Where the status remains the same over a particular period, the appropriate range of dates can be put into the day and month column (e.g. '5–12/2/99', where 5 February is the first day when the nest was observed with that status, and 12 February the last). If more than eight observations are made, continue onto the second card (third side) as shown in the example.

8. YEAR **[always complete]**

The year of the observation. ***Please take note that this box exists!!*** Lots of NRCs have been submitted without this important box completed.

9. DAY & MONTH **[always complete]**

The day and month of the observation — one row for one date, or range of dates where the status remained unchanged.

10. NO. OF EGGS **[complete only when applicable]**

Write in this column the number of eggs seen in the nest, if any, for every visit recorded. **You should <u>not</u> purposely flush an incubating adult off its nest** in order to see how many eggs are present. The whole ethos of nest recording is to disturb breeding birds as little as possible so as to minimise the risk of the breeding attempt failing.

11. No. of young in nest / out nest **[complete only when applicable]**
For the first 'sub-column' of this, under '**in nest**', record the number of chicks that are observed actually *in* the nest. **Please do not just tick it since this provides us with far less useful data**. Under '**out nest**', record the number of young seen away from the nest, having fledged but still remaining dependent on their parents.

12. Status: Insert codes from below **[always complete]**
In this column, write **all** the numbers for the relevant status codes from the 'Status Codes' box immediately below the table. This may simply be one code, or a combination. Try to put in all the applicable codes to give as full a picture as possible of the status for that visit.

13. Additional notes **[complete only when applicable]**
For this column, write any further details that may be of interest or relevance to the breeding attempt. This could be presence of the adults around the nest and their activity, aspects of courtship behaviour, behaviour of chicks towards each other or the adults, adverse weather conditions, disturbance, predation, ideas on why eggs were found broken, and so on. It is here too that you should detail any information on brood parasites and their hosts, i.e. specify the other species involved and what exactly was observed. Here too record numbers of nests in a colony and proportions that are at each different stage that you can tell e.g. "20% nest-building, 40% incubating, 30% feeding young in nest, 10% inactive or deserted".

14. Status codes
These are the codes that should be used to fill in under section / box 12 (see above). They are divided into the main components of a breeding attempt, starting with the nest through to the adult and finishing with any disturbance that may have been noted.

Nest:

1. **Completed.** Nest, as far as can be told, has been recently completed. If you see a nest where the materials are beginning to decay and there is no sign of activity, this may be an old nest from a previous season and should not be recorded.
2. **Deserted.** Nest has been recently built, and eggs possibly laid and even

young hatched but the nest was then deserted for some reason (known or unknown). Usually this code applies after you have been watching a nest attempt for some time.

Eggs:

3. **Being incubated.** Adult observed sitting on nest known to contain eggs, or for prolonged periods in manner of an incubating bird.
4. **Hatching.** Eggs actually observed when chicks are emerging from them.
5. **Abandoned / infertile.** Eggs known to have been left un-incubated for a long time; after a day or two, it should be confirmed that the eggs have been abandoned before finally entering this code n the 'Status' column. MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE NOT ABANDONED BECAUSE OF YOUR INTERFERENCE! Infertile eggs normally occur as the odd one or two in a clutch of other, fertile eggs and simply do not hatch along with the others. These are easy to identify since they are left in the nest after the chicks have hatched and developed. On occasion, a whole clutch will be infertile; these are usually incubated for far longer than a normal clutch before the adult gives up. For these it is important that the observer returns and double checks the nest more than once, to confirm that the eggs really have been abandoned.
6. **Broken** Eggs found broken in or near nest — please give possible reason for breakage if it can be determined. (Remember that in some species, broken eggshells under the nest may be a sign that the chicks have hatched.)

Young:

7. **Naked** Young are very small and unfeathered.
8. **Downy** This applies to precocial species such as raptors, waders, francolin, nightjars etc. where the young hatch with downy feathers and are never naked as such.
9. **Feathered** Young have developed enough for feathers to have grown to a significant extent; if possible indicate under 'Additional notes' how far grown the feathers are, as this is a useful indication as to how much the young have developed and how long it will be until they fledge.
10. **Ready to fledge.** Body feathers entirely grown, wing feathers probably still 'in pin' (i.e. with a waxy sheath around the base) but sufficiently grown to enable the young bird to fly at least a short distance.

11. **Seen leaving nest.** For this category, in nidifugous species, the young will have only just hatched and will also be 'downy' when they leave the nest; for nidicolous species, the young will be more-or-less fully feathered.
12. **Flightless & accompanying ad.** This refers to nidifugous species such as waders, francolins, ducks, grebes, crakes etc., where the chicks are not in the nest, but are too young to fly (or can only fly a short distance) and are accompanied by at least one adult who is looking after them.
13. **Fledged & begging food / being fed by ad.** Young must be seen either persistently begging food from adult of a non-migratory species AND/ OR actually being fed by adult. The young of several migrant species will continue to beg for food whilst on migration or even on wintering grounds many thousands of kilometres from the breeding site. This is most commonly seen amongst terns, but is also recorded in, for example, flamingos.
14. **Dead**. Chick(s) found dead either in or out of nest. If possible, please state probable cause of death under 'Additional notes'.

Adult:

15. **Courting**. Adults observed displaying and courting. Beware not to confuse territorial display (which may be for a feeding territory rather than breeding site) for breeding display
16. **Mating**. Adults observed actually mating; beware of display behaviour in some species where it appears the birds are mating (one mounting another) where in fact they are not, e.g. Hamerkop.
17. **Carrying nest material.** Where an adult bird is observed carrying nesting material; nest not necessarily seen.
18. **Building nest**. Nest observed with adult actively building or, for a hole nesting species, excavating it.
19. **At / entering nest (contents not seen)**. Nest either inaccessible due to height or location, or because it is in a hole and therefore impossible to see into; adult seen at the nest / nest entrance behaving in a way that suggests they are probably nesting.
20. **Incubating**. Adult observed sitting on nest or entering nest hole and remaining inside for extended period of time (an hour or more).
21. **Carrying food**. Adults can be observed collecting food and flying off with it in their bills; this usually means that they are taking food to

young in a nest somewhere (they might also be courtship feeding, so try to observe where they go). Often the adult can be followed and the nest itself found, but if not, this status is good enough to record for a confirmed breeding attempt.

22. **Agitated near nest** If a potential threat comes close to an active nest, the adults will normally become quite agitated. Some species may even attack the intruder, bird-lover or not! Some birds, e.g. waders, use a 'broken-wing display' where they pretend to have damaged a wing so that they cannot fly, thus attracting the intruder towards them and away from the vulnerable young in the nest. Please note as much detail of the behaviour as possible.

Disturbance:

23. **Human**. Record this status if you observe or learn of anyone disturbing the nest, whether this is done on purpose or by accident.
24. **Animal**. Adults clearly disturbed by presence of another animal, e.g. snake, large mammal, mongoose, monitor lizard etc. Please note what the disturbance was under 'Additional notes'.
25. **Predation**. Nest observed being depredated or shows clear signs of this when visited (e.g. broken eggs in and around the nest). Record details under 'Additional notes'.
26. **Bad weather** Poor weather (heavy rain, strong winds, etc.) has damaged or is threatening the safety of the nest, either directly or indirectly (for example, heavy rain causing the river level to rise and threaten to wash away nest). Again, record details under 'Additional notes'.
27. **Other (describe above)** Where an activity is observed that does not fit in to any of the previous 26 categories; describe it as fully as possible under the 'Additional notes' column for the appropriate date.

15. NEST SITE

Site description: In the space provided (or continuing on to the second, extra card), describe the details of *where* the nest itself is located — e.g. "in the fork of a branch towards the centre of a dense bush", "tucked under the edge of a roof of small house", "on ground partially hidden under the northern side of a tuft of grass". This describes the physical place in which the nest has been built — NOT what the nest looks like, nor the name of the area or location.

Nest / eggs description (e.g. material, shape, size): Here describe how the nest is constructed, including its shape e.g. 'cup nest' (the most common nest style), a 'purse-like' structure (e.g. sunbirds, crombecs), a 'platform' (many raptors), a 'simple scrape' (most waders, nightjars, game birds), etc. If possible measure or estimate and note its dimensions (width, depth), and describe the material that the nest is made from. Also describe the eggs if they can be seen — colour, size, shape etc.

Height above ground: in metres, estimate the height the nest is located above the ground.

Side three

This is the second card and is mainly blank space. It simply provides space for extra information that you may have noted about the breeding attempt. Use it to add extra days when the nest was visited many times, or for extra descriptions of the nest site and construction. Any added behaviour is also interesting and worth noting down, as are sketches of the nest and/or its location. For boxes 16. and 17., the details written here should be *exactly the same* as for boxes 1. and 2. This is in order that if the two cards become separated by mistake, they can be matched up again without too much trouble. Please ensure that you complete these boxes fully! And to ensure that the two cards do not become separated, please attach this second, extra card to the main one, preferably by stapling them together.

Extra comments and conclusion

There are certain things that should be considered and observed when looking for and watching breeding birds. In the interests of the birds and their attempts to breed successfully, the over-riding rule is **'Disturb the birds as little as possible':**

- Try not to visit a nest more often than is necessary to keep track of the major events in the breeding attempt.
- Excessive disturbance from an observer (or observers) may cause the birds to desert the nest so that the breeding attempt fails.
- Be very careful how you approach nests: frequent or careless visits can draw the attention of a predator.

A mirror on a long stick can often be useful to check the contents of a nest high in a bush or tree. It saves you having to climb the tree and perhaps disturb or dislodge the nest (or indeed fall out of the tree yourself!)

Overall, we hope that this new design of card will be easier to use than the previous ones. Please remember to complete BOTH sides of the main card and ALL the details in the top two boxes of the second card if it is used.

All and any comments and suggestions on the card are most welcome and should be sent to the Nest Record Scheme Co-ordinator, EANHS, P. O. Box 44486, Nairobi.

Waterbirds on Kenyan wetlands, 1998 and 1999

Joseph Oyugi and Alfred Owino
Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

1998 overview

As usual, the waterbird counts in 1998 were carried out both in January/ February and mid-year with over 180 volunteers taking part.

Following the heavy El Niño rains at the end of 1997 and start of 1998, most wetlands had high water levels and several temporary wetlands emerged. Waterbirds were generally much more dispersed than usual, and numbers of birds counted at particular sites were low compared to past years. This was especially obvious in the wetlands around Nairobi and Limuru. The very wet and muddy conditions in January also created practical difficulties — many access roads were virtually impassable!

Thirty sites were covered in different parts of the country in January 1998. The range of sites was the greatest so far, including wetlands around Nairobi and Limuru, in the Rift Valley, the coast, the upper Tana River, Lake Victoria and Lake Ol'Bollosat. Several sites were counted for the first time. Once again wetlands in the Rift Valley (which include several important Lesser Flamingo feeding grounds) contained by far the most waterbirds — almost 950,000 in total, of 90 different species. Approximate totals for other regions were: Nairobi and Limuru areas, 2,600; coastal Kenya, 4,200; the upper Tana dams, 2,400; Lake Victoria region, 2,700; and Lake

Ol'Bollosat 3,900. Of course, not all the wetlands at the coast or Lake Victoria were counted. The number of flamingos was higher in the Rift Valley in January 1998 than in some previous years (c. 914,000 individuals). At Naivasha, water had risen and flooded the fringing papyrus, so many waterbirds were hidden in inaccessible lagoons. A large proportion of the birds may have been missed here.

The mid-year waterbird counts conducted between July and August covered nine different sites (Lake Nakuru and the two adjacent sets of sewage treatment ponds, Lake Ol'Bollosat and the five dams located on the upper Tana). Lake levels at Lake Nakuru were very low compared to the other year, and only 2,600 flamingos were recorded. However, the fish-eating waterbirds such as cormorants and pelicans showed a significant rise in numbers, responding to the re-appearance of fish. Lake Ol'Bollosat and the upper Tana dams also showed a general increase in the number of waterbirds counted compared to January.

January/February 1998

Nairobi and Limuru areas

The January 1998 waterbird counts in Nairobi and Limuru wetlands covered eight different sites, many of which were man-made wetlands (sewage treatment works). These were Manguo Floodplain, Limuru Sewage Ponds, Dandora Oxidation Ponds, Kenyatta University Sewage Works, Langata Road and AHV Church Property Ponds and the wetlands within Nairobi National Park. Numbers of birds dropped at Dandora Oxidation Ponds and Limuru Sewage Ponds, possibly due to dispersal to the many other temporary wetlands available after the rains. On the other hand, the well-flooded Manguo Floodplain showed a significant rise compared to January 1997.

A total of 2,639 waterbirds of 56 different species were recorded in Nairobi and Limuru sites. The bulk of these were at Dandora (2,163 individuals of 48 different species). Numbers for other sites were: Manguo Floodplain, 129; Kenyatta University Sewage Works, 100; Nairobi National Park, 92; Sukari Dam, 65;, Langata Road and AHW Church Property Ponds, 40; and Limuru Sewage Ponds, 20.

Ducks and geese (1,526) were the most abundant single waterbird group. Ibises and spoonbills (191) followed by tringine sandpipers (148) were the second and third most abundant groups. Garganey (576), Hottentot Teal (375) and Egyptian Goose (201) were the most abundant single species.

Rift Valley

Nine different sites were surveyed in the Rift Valley during the January counts. These were Lakes Naivasha, Nakuru, Magadi, Bogoria, Turkana (a partial count), Elmenteita, Sonachi, Oloidien and the Nakuru Sewage Works. A total of 947,495 waterbirds of 90 species were counted in Rift Valley lakes. As usual, flamingos were the most abundant (914,694 in all). Other species of waterbirds totalled just 33,801 for all the wetlands counted in the Rift Valley. Lake Naivasha contained the highest number of species (60) followed by Nakuru (59) and Elmenteita (51). The lowest number of species was at Lake Sonachi — just three.

Lake Bogoria had the most waterbirds (544,701 individuals) followed by Nakuru (353,757), Magadi (30,468), Elmenteita (13,003), Naivasha (2,172), Oloidien (1,691), Turkana (1,098 — only a small section was counted), Nakuru Sewage works (596) and Sonachi (9). The count for Naivasha was notably low, probably due in part to many birds lurking invisibly behind the papyrus, in newly created lagoons. After flamingos, calidrid sandpipers were the second most abundant group (12,733), the bulk of these being at Lake Nakuru (8,891 individuals). Ducks and geese were the third most abundant group (6,591), with the highest record from Lake Elmenteita (3,707 individuals).

Lesser Flamingo (898,311), Greater Flamingo (15,383) and Ruff (7,831) were the most abundant of any single species recorded in the Rift Valley. A good number of Chestnut-banded Plover (447) were recorded at Lake Magadi. Numbers of African Fish Eagles at Lake Naivasha declined again — only 67 were counted.

Kenya coast

The Kenya coast has a variety of different wetlands which provide good habitats for different species of waterbirds, most of which are Palaearctic migrants. The January 1998 waterbird counts covered five different wetlands. These were Lake Chem Chem, Malindi Harbour, Malindi Golf Course, Mida Creek and Sabaki River Mouth. A total of 4,239 waterbirds of 41 species were recorded, the majority at Mida Creek (3,199 waterbirds of 21 different species). However, Sabaki River Mouth had the highest number of species (33) and was the second in terms of number of waterbirds (712 individuals). Malindi Harbour, Lake Chem Chem and Malindi Golf Course held 232, 87 and 26 waterbirds respectively.

Among the waterbird groups, Palaearctic plovers were the most abundant (2,268) followed by calidrid sandpipers (1,014) and stilts and avocets (236). The Ringed Plover (714) was the most abundant single waterbird species, followed by Grey Plover (690) and Crab-plover (586).

Lake Victoria region

The January waterbird counts in the Lake Victoria region covered three different sites: Dunga Fishing Beach, Nyamware Rice Field and Sondu-Miriu River Mouth. The water levels at the sites were high and the Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* formed a thick carpet on the lake, especially at Dunga Fishing Beach. A total of 2,737 waterbirds of 42 different species were recorded from the three sites surveyed. Sondu-Miriu River Mouth had the highest number of waterbirds and species (1,419 individuals of 35 different species). The other sites, Nyamware Rice Field and Dunga Fishing Beach, held 1,115 and 203 waterbirds respectively.

Gulls and terns (673 individuals) formed the dominant group, followed by tringine sandpipers (507) and calidrid sandpipers (361). White-winged Tern (620) was the most abundant species, followed by Ruff *(314)* and Common Sandpiper *(226)*.

Upper Tana River dams

The five upper Tana dams (Gitaru, Kiambere, Kindaruma, Kamburu and Masinga) were surveyed during February 1998 with thirteen volunteers taking part using boats. The water level was high in all the reservoirs. A total of 2,422 waterbirds of 43 different species were recorded from the sites. Masinga Dam had the highest number of waterbirds (1,115 individuals of 29 different species). Other counts were Kamburu, 652; Kindaruma, 284; Gitaru, 209; and Kiambere 127 waterbirds.

Gulls and terns (487) were the most numerous group, followed closely by cormorants and darter (474), tringine sandpipers (449) and calidrid sandpipers (284). Great Cormorant (447), Common Greenshank (379) and Whiskered Tern (360) were the most numerous single species.

Lake Ol'Bolossat

Lake Ol'Bolossat is one of the several wetlands found in central Kenya (Nyandarua District). It covers an area of about 90 square kilometres of which about 80% is marsh and 15% open water, while the remaining 5% is open land that is seasonally flooded. The site was counted for the first time

as part of the annual African Waterfowl Census (AfWC). The total of 3,921 waterbirds of 46 different species, including 1,155 Hottentot Teal, was quite impressive.

1998 mid-year waterbird counts

The 1998 mid-year waterbird counts were carried out during the months of July and August. Nine different sites were surveyed: Lake Nakuru (with the two nearby sewage works), Lake Ol'Bolossat and the five Upper Tana Dams. The counts at Lake Nakuru and adjacent sites were a continuation of the mid-year count that has been carried out there since 1990. The other sites were being counted for the first time during mid-year with support from the KWS-Netherlands Wetlands Programme. Training of waterbird counters, mainly staff from Kenya Wildlife Service, was also carried out at Kamburu during the counts at the Upper Tana dams

The results for the mid-year counts were interesting. Very few flamingos were present at Lake Nakuru, but fish-eating waterbirds such as cormorants and pelicans had returned in good numbers. Greater Flamingo was spotted for the first time at Masinga Dam (a freshwater wetland). Some of the rare waterbird species in Kenya, such as Great Crested Grebe, African Darter, Little and Dwarf Bitterns and Chestnut-banded Plover, were also recorded.

Lake Nakuru

The annual mid-year waterbird counts at Lake Nakuru took place on 18–19 July 1998 with 66 volunteers taking part. Both the lake and the two nearby sewage works (Njoro and Town) were counted. There was the usual buffalo problem in certain sections but no serious incidents. The lake level was quite high with thick mud in many places along the shoreline. Over 16,000 waterbirds of 66 different species were recorded in total, about 1,100 of these from the sewage works.

Flamingos (Greater and Lesser) were remarkably few, only 2,613 being recorded. The lake waters were high and unusually dilute, so feeding conditions were probably poor for these species. There was however a significant rise in the numbers of grebes (2,650), gulls (2,384) and pelicans (2,300). Particularly notable were records of rare species in Kenya such as Great Crested Grebe (2), Dwarf Bittern (1), Little Bittern (1) and Chestnut-banded Plover (5). Great Crested Grebe was once a common species at Nakuru, but these records are the first here for many years.

Lake Ol'Bolossat

Twenty-three volunteer counted here on 25 July 1998. The water level was high and most sections of the swampy edges were muddy, making some parts inaccessible. Despite this, over 4,800 waterbirds of 59 different species were recorded — more than in January. The leading waterbird groups were ducks and geese (1,493), herons and egrets (954) and ibises and spoonbills (779). Yellow-billed Duck (1,080), Cattle Egret (456) and Egyptian Goose (376) were the most abundant of any single species recorded. African Snipe (8) and Giant Kingfisher (3) were some of the unusual waterbirds recorded.

Upper Tana dams

The five dams on the upper Tana River (Gitaru, Kamburu, Kiambere, Kindaruma and Masinga) were counted from 2-7 August 1998. Over 23,000 waterbirds of 53 different species were recorded, substantially more than in January.

Masinga Dam, by far the largest of these sites, held 22,254 waterbirds of 39 different species, including a notable 19,143 White-faced Whistling Duck.

Numbers at the other sites were much lower: Kiambere, 476; Kamburu, 377; Kindaruma, 320; and Gitaru, 84. Across all the dams, the leading waterbird groups were ducks and geese (19,976, mainly White-faced Whistling Ducks!), cormorants and darter (1,203) and herons and egrets (655).

Forty-five Greater Flamingo were sighted at Masinga, along with an encouraging 53 African Darters and 20 Giant Kingfisher.

January/February 1999

In January 1999, 39 sites were covered — a substantial increase compared to previous years. Rainfall since mid-1998 had been below average and the water level in all sites was low, often with extensive mud flats. Most seasonal wetlands were dry and waterbirds were not as dispersed as in January 1998. Sites within the Rift Valley, including Ol'Bolossat, parts of Lake Turkana and three dams on the Kinangop plateau, held over 1,200,000 waterbirds of 112 species. Wetlands within Nairobi and central Kenya held approximately 16,500 waterbirds of 81 species; there were 23,200 waterbirds of 85 species at six sites on the Kenya Coast, 34,600 of 69 species at the

five Upper Tana River dams (including Sagana fish ponds), and 2,950 waterbirds of 53 species at sites around Lake Victoria.

Overall, the number of flamingos in the Rift Valley was higher than in recent years (over 1.2 million counted). Numbers were highest at Lake Bogoria (1,070,000, almost twice as many as the previous year) followed by Lakes Magadi (40,500) and Nakuru (11,900). The number of flamingos at Nakuru, although still unusually low, increased considerably compared to July 1998, perhaps linked to the drop in water level. At other sites, such as Dandora Oxidation Ponds, the number of waterbirds (especially ducks) showed a rise. Birds may have concentrated on permanent sites as seasonal wetlands, where they had dispersed in 1998 after the El Niño rains, dried up. The high number counted is therefore probably a good reflection of the actual number of waterbirds in the region.

Rift Valley lakes, ponds and dams

Rift Valley wetlands were counted between 9 and 31 January 1999. The sites covered (in order of counting) and numbers of waterbirds recorded were Bogoria (1,078,434), Nakuru (26,850), Nakuru Sewage Ponds (2,325), Elmenteita (9,577), Magadi (44,716), Naivasha (10,507), Oloidien (3,351), Sonachi (378), Turkana (1,424), Ol'Bolossat (25,154) and Kinangop Dams (802). Apart from flamingos, the most numerous groups were Afrotropical ducks and geese (14,100), rallids and jacanas (mainly coots) (10,627), followed by pelicans (6,686), Calidrinid sandpipers (6,187) and grebes (5,925).

Some notable records included 19 Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, including several juveniles, at Lake Elmenteita, where they had clearly been nesting. There were good numbers of Great White Pelicans at Elmenteita (1,400) and Nakuru (3,600), though still only a tenth of the numbers recorded in the early 1990s). More than 700 Red-knobbed Coot were counted at Naivasha (still very few, but a good increase over the very low numbers of recent counts), and there were two African Darters at Naivasha as well.

Lake Ol'Bolossat was particularly interesting this year. For the first time it exceeded the Ramsar qualifying criterion of 20,000 individuals, with a total of a total of 25,154 waterbirds of an impressive 82 species. The lake level was low, with turbid water, and most sections of the swamp were dry. There were a notable 8,100 Red-knobbed Coot, almost 6,000 Egyptian

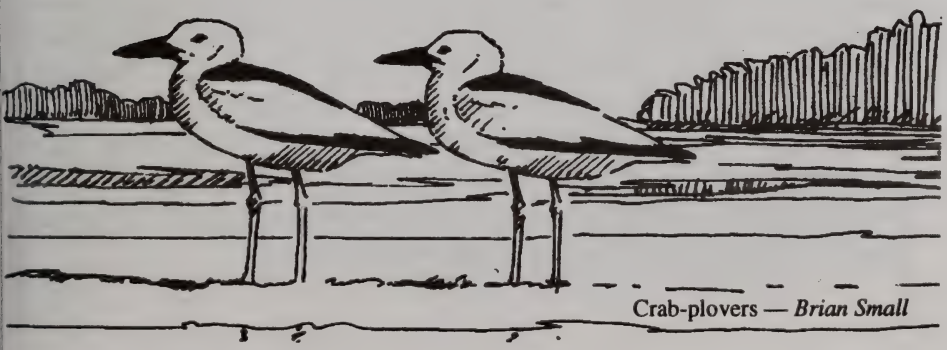
Geese, and nearly 2,000 Sacred Ibis. Three regionally threatened waterbird species were also recorded: eight Great Crested Grebes, 29 Maccoa Duck and 40 White-backed Duck.

Wetlands around Nairobi

Nairobi wetlands were counted between 6 and 27 January 1999, mainly on the Wednesday morning birdwalks. The bulk of the waterbirds were, as usual, at Dandora Ponds. The sites covered (in order of counting) and numbers of waterbirds recorded were Manguo Floodplain (834), Limuru Sewage Ponds (98), Gethumbwini Dam (562), Dandora Oxidation Ponds (13,718), Jogoo Road Pond (28), Hillcrest Dam (198), Langata Road and AHV Church (82), Fourteen Falls (112), Clayworks Ltd Pond (38), Kenyatta Univ. Sewage Works (303), Nairobi Racecourse Pond (21), Nairobi National Park (545) and Runda Pond (18). The most abundant groups were grebes (4,837), Afrotropical ducks and geese (2,919) and rallids and jacanas (2,561, again mainly coots). Notable records included 56 White-backed Duck on Manguo Ponds. There were two African Darters at Langata Road pond and one at Fourteen Falls.

Wetlands at the Kenya coast

Coastal wetlands were counted between 27 January and 8 February 1999, the sites covered and numbers of waterbirds recorded being Arabuko Swamp (1,405), Fundisha Saltworks (523), Lake Chem Chem (2,203), Malindi Harbour (1,030), Mida Creek (4,749), Sabaki River Mouth (14,310). The most abundant groups were Calidrinid sandpipers (10,056) and Palaearctic plovers (2,510). Some notable records were around 390 African Open-



Crab-plovers — *Brian Small*

billed Storks and the same number of African Jacanas at Lake Chem Chem; nearly 700 Crab-plovers at Mida Creek; and one Lesser Jacana and 13 African Darters at Arabuko Swamp.

Upper Tana dams and Sagana Fish Ponds

These sites were counted between 30 January and 13 February 1999. The sites and their waterbird numbers were Kindaruma (108), Gitaru (166), Sagana Fish Ponds (328), Kamburu (1,067), Kiambere (1,080) and Masinga (31,879). As usual Masinga held by far the bulk of the waterbirds. The most numerous groups were Afrotropical ducks and geese (29,114) and cormorants and darters (1,947). There were good numbers of African Darters (228) on the Upper Tana dams, and 28,900 Afrotropical duck (including around 16,800 White-faced Whistling Duck) on Masinga alone.

Lake Victoria Wetlands

Counted on 30–31 January 1999 were Sondu Miriu River Mouth (473 waterbirds), Obange Pond (109), Nyamware Rice Fields (1,814) and Dunga (554). The most numerous groups were terns (1,196, a good number) and Calidridinid sandpipers (428).

Acknowledgements

Once again the waterbird count organisers (the Department of Ornithology, NMK) are grateful to the volunteers who have over the years been such enthusiastic participants. We thank all those who generously provided vehicles and boats; Elsamere Field Studies Centre and the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute (through the KWS-Netherlands Wetlands Programme) for counters' accommodation; Delamere's Camp for permission to count at Lake Elmenteita; the Tropical Biology Association for the loan of binoculars; and the many others who assisted in various ways. Financial support for the 1998/1999 counts came from the Ramsar Bureau's Wetland Conservation Fund and the KWS-Netherlands Wetlands Programme. The waterbird counts are a collaborative effort between the Department of Ornithology (National Museums of Kenya), Nature Kenya (the East Africa Natural History Society) and the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Dr James F. Lynch

James F. Lynch, Smithsonian Research Scientist and Research Associate of the Ornithology Department, lost a long battle with cancer on March 26, 1998. He died at his home in Shady Side, Maryland, USA. Despite the difficulties of his illness, he carried out fieldwork in Texas only three weeks before he died. Over the past year, he produced several new papers and manuscripts and sustained an active correspondence with colleagues around the world.

Jim Lynch was a man with a great love of life and a large appetite for its many aspects. He was a productive scientist, a willing teacher, a talented artist, a gifted musician, and a generous friend.

Jim was born in Boston Massachusetts in November 1942. He went to Harvard College, graduating *cum laude* in 1964 with a BA in geology. He was a man of many facets. To help put himself through school, he sang professionally with a group aptly named 'The Lynch Mob'. He also rowed during this period, and made the decision to concentrate on science rather than train as a member of the American Olympic rowing squad.

From Harvard Jim moved to the University of California at Berkeley to pursue his PhD. It was at this stage that he underwent a major change in research direction. During his first two years at Berkeley he was a graduate student in Geology. After a summer geology work experience in a mine in Montana, he switched his major to zoology, graduating in 1974. His thesis was titled 'Ontogenetic and geographic variation in the morphology and ecology of the Black Salamander, *Aneides flavipunctatus*'.

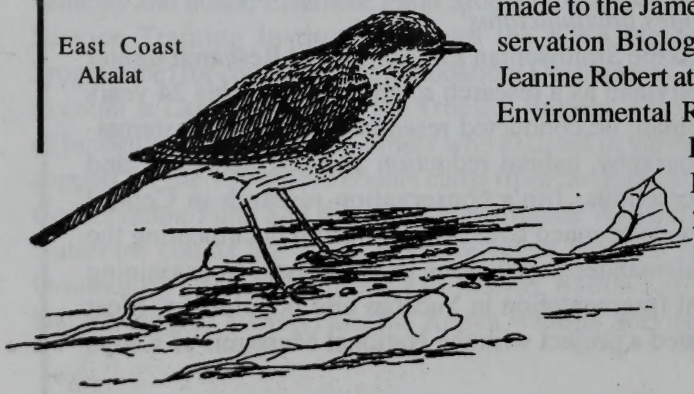
Jim then joined the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland as a research scientist. During his 24 years with the Smithsonian, he conducted research in ecology, systematics, island biogeography, habitat reduction and fragmentation, and animal-plant interactions. Jim's conservation research in Central America and Mexico spanned over 30 years, from documenting the distribution of salamander populations in Guatemala to examining impacts of habitat fragmentation in Yucatan bird populations. Most recently, he initiated a project with the National Museums of Kenya

to monitor bird populations in Laikipia, comparing avian communities in areas with a variety of human impacts. (His last visit to Laikipia was in late 1997, when despite frail health he was able to take Museum researchers around some of his study plots at Mpala Ranch. Jim's enthusiasm for birds was undiminished by illness and together we enjoyed dramatic aerial displays by Lanners, a surprise flock of overflying Open-billed Storks, and pinning down the identification of Boran Cisticola...).

Over the course of Jim's career, he worked on amphibians, birds, mammals, reptiles and ants, and conducted research over an enormous range of the world, including North, Central, and South America, Australia, and East Africa — not to mention many parts of the United States.

Jim produced over 60 scientific publications. He was actively involved in many professional societies, advisory committees, and nonprofit organizations, such as the World Wildlife Fund and the American Bird Conservancy. A regular reviewer for many international journals, he was an enthusiastic collaborator with scientists from all over the world.

In order to support new scientists working in conservation biology, a fund has been set up in Jim's honour through the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. The James F. Lynch Conservation Biology Fund will assist students and researchers working in Central America and East Africa. The goal is to build this fund into an endowment that will continue to help scientists interested in conservation biology for years to come. Contributions and inquiries may be made to the James F. Lynch Conservation Biology Fund, care of Jeanine Robert at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, P O Box 28, Edgewater, MD 21037, USA. The first award from this Fund will be made in 1999.



East Coast Akalat

Don't forget...

World Birdwatch
2–3 October 1999

To register, contact Nature Kenya.

NTT World Birdwatch is on again this year too — for the WHOLE month of October. Please send ANY records from ANYWHERE in Kenya for ANYTIME in October to the Ornithology Department. Every species on the final list earns money for bird conservation.

Kenya's NTT ranking has slipped recently because we haven't gathered records over the whole month — you can help claw our way back up to the top!

Contacts

For *Kenya Birds* • National Birdmap • nest record cards

Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, e-mail kbirds@africaonline.co.ke, tel. 742161/31 ext. 243, fax 741424

For Bird Committee • birdwalks and excursions • birding hotline • regional birding groups • *Scopus* subscriptions

Nature Kenya, P O Box 44486, Nairobi, e-mail eanhs@africaonline.co.ke, tel. 749957/746090, fax 741049

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